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The Great Savings Scare

How The Concord Coalition Got It All Exactly Wrong

BY JOHN B. JUDIS

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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CORRESPONDENCE

Food fight

To the editors:

Your article ("Hazardous to Your Mental Health," December 30) by Stephen Glass about the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) and its executive director, Michael F. Jacobson, contained a staggering array of inaccuracies, gross omissions and unfair attacks. However, the lack of objectivity might have been expected from a writer who weeks earlier wrote "I believe in Big Business" and, when he worked at the pro-business Heritage Foundation, urged that school lunch programs be turned over to companies like Taco Bell and Marriott.

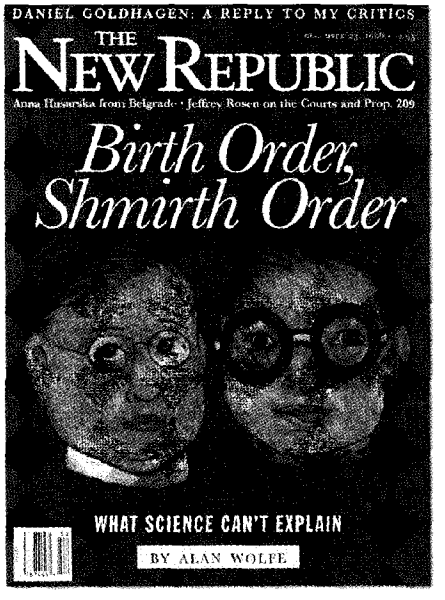
The sheer quantity of errors in the article not only calls into question whether minimum standards of objective journalism were consciously disregarded, but makes an adequate response in limited space impossible. Nevertheless, I take this opportunity to highlight the most egregious inaccuracies.

Glass claims a 1989 article about an "uncontrolled" 1988 study on caffeine and pregnancy found that "would-be mothers who drank more than a cup's worth of caffeine had not gotten pregnant after three months of trying." Wrong. The article describes an appropriately controlled *two-year* study; pregnancy rates were reported for the first *thirteen months.*

He accuses CSPI of being "downright absurd" because of an inaccurate 1994 article titled "Food Sensitivities." Glass contends that our description of a *Journal of the American Medical Association* case report of food poisoning was "not at all what happened," because the victim actually tried to treat himself with the "wrong pill" and then "ate every bite of the poisonous meal." Wrong. Our article *did* note that the man treated himself with epinephrine, though it did not discuss the oral medication taken earlier. We did *not* report that he ate the *entire* "poisonous" meal because he *hadn't.* The *JAMA* report states: "After eating one bite of his *entree* [which contained the peanuts] ... [h]e refused the remainder of *that* dish ... and then consumed the *rest* of his meal" (italics added). Glass also states that "the *JAMA* article strikes a cautionary note ... stating that fatal food allergies occur 'rarely,' " implying that we exaggerated the problem. Wrong. We noted that true food allergies affect no more than about 2 percent of adults and cause only about half a dozen deaths a year.

Glass claims that "CSPI's [restaurant] studies won little respect among scientists." In fact, U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists think so highly of our studies they requested raw data for inclusion in the USDA's comprehensive nutritional database and requested samples of meals we tested so they could measure certain additional nutrients. CSPI's scientific credibility was underscored in 1996 when FDA Commissioner David Kessler honored Jacobson with the agency's highest award, the Commissioner's Special Citation.

Glass faults CSPI for wanting to have our studies, petitions and other activities publicized in the popular media. If that be sinful, we confess—but do not apologize. Such publicity is an occasional whisper into the public's ear compared to the continuous roar of Procter & Gamble's


DANIEL GOLDHAGEN: A REPLY TO MY CRITICS
THE NEW REPUBLIC
Anna Husarska from Belgrade · Jeffrey Rosen on the Courts and Prop. 209
Birth Order, Shmirth Order
WHAT SCIENCE CAN'T EXPLAIN
BY ALAN WOLFE

$2.8 billion annual advertising budget, PepsiCo's $1.2 billion, or McDonald's $880 million. CSPI's work attracts journalistic attention because we provide accurate, new information, which experience demonstrates is trustworthy.

The article castigates CSPI's opposition to Procter & Gamble's fat substitute olestra. Glass fails to note that our concerns are shared by many eminent scientists, including Dr. Walter Willett, chairman of the nutrition department at the Harvard School of Public Health, and Dr. D. Mark Hegsted, USDA's former chief of human nutrition. In fact, CSPI's concerns about olestra stem from Procter & Gamble's own tests proving that olestra interferes with the absorption of carotenoids and sometimes causes abdominal cramping and other gastrointestinal symptoms.

Glass says that "essentially, CSPI claimed P&G's olestra studies were invalid since they pooled [two] heterogeneous smaller studies." That was *not* "essentially" our argument. Even pooled, the studies proved that a typical serving of olestra (equivalent to two ounces of chips) can cause gastrointestinal symptoms. (The FDA evaluated the adverse effects from the two studies separately *and* pooled.)

Glass asserts that "temporary diarrhea ... [is] not a hazardous medical condition." For much of the population that's true. But Glass should have reported that FDA medical officer Karl Klontz, after reviewing a Procter & Gamble study on olestra, concluded that "the increased water loss in the stools of subjects reporting olestra-associated diarrhea or loose stools is of concern ... for the elderly and young children."

Glass says that CSPI has tried to discredit pro-olestra scientists by claiming they were connected to industry. We, indeed, have questioned the credibility of the FDA's olestra-review committee, because so many of its members have ties to industry. That committee voted 17 to 5 to support the approval of olestra. At least nine of the seventeen who favored olestra have consulted for or received grants from the food industry.

Glass questions CSPI's credibility because fourteen years ago we received a grant from the environmentally oriented Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation. While Glass says that the foundation was "founded with tobacco money," he all-too-conveniently fails to note that it was established not by a tobacco company, but by an heiress and, further, in the 1970s divested itself of all tobacco holdings. We believe that the funding we have received is distant enough from industry to ensure that it cannot reasonably be considered to constitute "industry" funding or pose a conflict of interest. CSPI is proud of its achievements despite eschewing all funding from government, corporations, corporate foundations or trade associations.

KATHLEEN F. O'REILLY
Chair, Board of Directors
Center for Science in the Public Interest

Stephen Glass replies:

My article contended that CSPI cloaks shoddy research and hysteria under the banner of science. Kathleen O'Reilly's letter offers further proof of my thesis.

Start with O'Reilly's discussion of the caffeine study. I wrote that CSPI's attempt to link caffeine and three months of infertility is nonsensical. O'Reilly says the study looked at thirteen-month fertility rates. But CSPI's March 1989 newsletter specifically says that the *Lancet* study began looking at caffeine intake after three months. Then it looked again at six months and one year. Each claim is on shaky ground. It is, as I wrote, common for physicians to wait at least a year and often more before a woman trying to conceive is diagnosed as infertile. After receiving O'Reilly's letter, I double-checked my research with

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Ben Younger, executive director of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine. "I'm sure you can get an article or single report [linking caffeine to infertility]," Younger said. "But in science you've got to have it shown over and over again in real, well-designed studies and that is simply not there."

As for the story on food sensitivities, the *JAMA* article is somewhat unclear. It says the customer refused his dish, took the wrong medication, then consumed the rest of his meal. Two medical librarians and I read the "rest of his meal" as including the entree. CSPI reads it as including everything but the entree. What's not unclear is that CSPI newsletter's "special feature" was over the top. The article begins with an anecdote about a woman who "almost died" from eating an almond danish. The next sentence says this woman is "one of tens of millions of Americans" who suffer from food sensitivities. *JAMA* researchers identified only seven fatal cases in a sixteen-month period.

Regarding olestra: O'Reilly takes me to task for not discussing its special impact on children. She should read the *Federal Register* that contains the FDA's final conclusions on olestra. After finding the fake fat safe for adults, it states: "there is no basis to conclude the effect of olestra on the gastrointestinal tract would be any different in children than in adults." Concerning the elderly, the FDA also dismissed this complaint in the *Federal Register*, stating: "FDA has determined that there is no basis to conclude that these subpopulations [including the elderly] would be at special risk due to consumption of olestra."

Once again, O'Reilly renews CSPI's criticism that FDA advisers were in bed with the food industry. As David Allison, an obesity expert who sat on the FDA's olestra panel, said in my article: "That's not the way science works. We examine evidence." Allison has never received a grant from P&G.

O'Reilly's claim that the FDA committee is somehow invalid since it lacks a carotenoids or vitamin K expert twists the facts. According to the *Federal Register*, the National Institutes of Health provided the committee with scientific testimony from carotenoid experts, including Dr. Willett, whom O'Reilly praises in her letter. Dr. John Suttie, a vitamin K expert at the University of Wisconsin, also testified before the committee.

For the record, I did not challenge CSPI's credibility for taking a grant from the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation. To the contrary, my point is if CSPI can take money from an organization founded with tobacco money and speak honestly about smoking, FDA advisers can take research grants from food companies and still look at olestra responsibly.

The German question

To the editors:

Daniel Jonah Goldhagen ("Motives, Causes, and Alibis," December 23) still doesn't get it. He accuses his critics of methodological innocence when it is his own indifference to logic that is the issue. His view of "eliminationist anti-Semitism" as the "necessary and sufficient" condition for the Nazi genocide exceeds the possibility of historical explanation for much lesser acts (could he name the necessary and sufficient condition for his breakfast menu this morning?) And it is he, not his critics, who announces "Hitler's Willing Executioners," allows himself a 500 percent margin of error in their number (100,000 to 500,000), and gives no account of the difference between *their* will to genocide and the culpability he ascribes to the 70,000,000 other Germans. This blurring of distinctions undermines all claims of responsibility: the effect of his extravagance is thus to diminish.

BEREL LANG
Albany, New York

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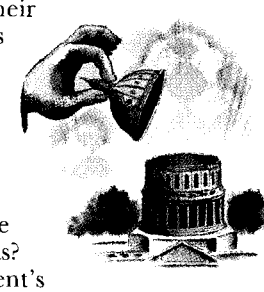
FROM WASHINGTON

Why it matters (II)

When stories of Asian Americans and Asian corporations giving illegal contributions to Clinton and the Democrats surfaced in the latter weeks of the presidential campaign, the president's supporters in his party and in the press trotted out the usual first line of defense in these matters (it was Nixon's, once) that, after all, everybody does it. Where was the difference between what the Clinton fund-raising operation had done and what all big political fund-raising operations do? What was the difference between, say, Archer Daniels Midland funneling all that money to Bob Dole over the years and the Lippo Group or the Charoen Pokaphand Group giving to the Clinton team? The only real difference, the president's supporters have argued, is racism: we xenophobic, jingoistic Americans are outraged not at corporate interests bribing our president and corrupting our political process, but at nasty foreigners—the yellow peril!—bribing our president and corrupting our political process. The immoral or scandalous behavior in this affair is not that of the president's bag men, but that of the president's critics, a bunch of Asian-bashing racists.

Clinton himself offered the most brazen and crude formulation of this argument. In a press conference on November 8, responding to a question from Helen Thomas about illegal and dubious contributions from Indonesian business interests, he lectured the reporter, saying, "there was in your question and in a lot of the things that have happened in the aftermath here ... an almost disparaging reference to Asians, and in the last few weeks a lot of Asian Americans who have supported our campaign have come up to me and said, 'You know, I'm being made to feel like a criminal. All of these people are calling me. I say: Why are you calling me? They say: Because you have an Asian last name.' " He continued, in a tone of wounded piety: "Maybe I don't need to do this, but I would like to remind everybody here and throughout the country that our country has been greatly enriched by the work of Asian Americans. They are famous for working hard, for family values and for giving more than they take. And I, frankly, am grateful for the support."

The smarminess of this was matched only by the ugliness of it. Consider the president's expedient account of Asian American supporters coming up to him to complain that "people" are calling them and making them "feel like a criminal" because they "have an Asian last name." By "supporters" Clinton clearly means "contributors" and by "people," "reporters." Who else would be making such telephone calls but reporters working their way through the chutes and ladders of the Clinton soft-money machine, and who else would they be calling but people listed on financial disclosure forms as having given what are suspected to be improper monetary gifts? The point of the president's sorrowful little tale, then, was to bully the press away from further exploring a scandal that threatens him. He played a race card.



A more elaborate rendition of the racism line was offered this week by TNR contributing editor Robert Wright in *Slate*. Wright argues that it is only really "subtle, probably subconscious racial prejudice that has turned a legitimately medium-sized scandal into a journalistic blockbuster." He excuses the fact that at least $1.2 million of the $7 million raised by the White House from culling Asian American donors has been shown to be illegal, or at least highly questionable, as the mere result of a fund-raising plan going "quite awry." Whoops-a-daisy.

The refutation to Clinton's argument, and Wright's, is found in Wright's own defense of Clinton. The nature of the Asian soft-money scandal is simple, Wright notes: "Foreign citizens or companies funneled money through domestic front men or front companies. And sometimes foreigners got to rub elbows with President Clinton. For all we know, they influenced policy." This is precisely, succinctly right. The soft-money scandal is not about Asian Americans contributing money to political candidates. It is about whether many of the Asian Americans who were targeted by Democratic Party fund-raiser John Huang under the supervision of the White House were really acting as fronts for Asian corporations or foreign businessmen (and, given that Asian businesses and governments often work in close concert, possibly also for foreign governments) who have an obvious interest in influencing American trade and foreign policies. Contributions of this sort are illegal, which is why people who raise money in such a fashion go to the trouble of laundering it through, for example, a Buddhist temple. Wright tries to get around this by suggesting that the "illegality of contributions from 'foreign' interests ... is increasingly meaningless" in today's climate of "economic globalization." Thus is the race card married to the religion of free trade.

And here is where the defense falls apart. The reason why it is against the law for foreigners and foreign corporations to give money to American politicians (even if they wash it through American citizens first) is that the law recognizes the manifest distinction between an American donor to a political campaign and a non-American one. First, the law recognizes that it is entirely possible that a rich American citizen, or an American corporation, might give money to a politician out of a disinterested motive. Rich people express themselves through money, and this expression need not be corrupt. David Geffen, say, might give half a million dollars to the Democratic Party because he sincerely believes that it is better for his country that the Democrats rule rather than the Republicans: he is giving money not exactly out of self-interest, but out of his perception of the national interest. It is definitionally impossible to say this of a foreign rich man, because America is not his nation. He has no stake in it; or rather, he has only a single stake in it, and it is commercial.

Second, the law recognizes that, even when American businesses or businessmen may be motivated by self-interest (which is most of the time), their self-interest may also be in the interest of America as a whole. This is, again definitionally, much less likely to be true of a foreign corporation. What's good for General Motors may or may not be good for America, but what's good for the Charoen Pokaphand Group is almost certainly going to be what's good for Thailand. Living in the global economy doesn't mean living in a state of universal harmony. It means living in a state of universal competition. And money from abroad is more likely working on the competition's behalf than on ours.

MICHAEL KELLY

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JANUARY 27, 1997

A KEVORKIAN CURE

Last week the Social Security advisory council issued a report detailing ways to save the program from drowning in red ink. That's good news: it means we're already past the denial stage. The bad news is that we've immediately vaulted into the giddy stage. Unburdened by the taboo of tinkering with Social Security, many of the council's members want to cut the umbilical cord entirely by privatizing the system.

Let's be clear: privatizing Social Security means essentially having no Social Security; it's a disastrous overreaction. Social Security faces a long-term deficit, but it's of nowhere near the magnitude of the Medicare crisis. Any combination of technical fixes could shore up Social Security's long-term deficit—adjusting the consumer price index or raising the retirement age, for example. All entail some measure of sacrifice. Which is why all thirteen council members agreed on an easier way to keep the program in the black: shifting part of the trust fund from safe government bonds into higher-yielding stocks.

From there, the consensus breaks down. The council's six most liberal members advocate shifting two-fifths of the trust fund into stocks—a reasonable and even wise idea. Putting all its assets into government bonds, as it does now, seems excessively cautious, yet dumping the whole thing into the market is too risky. The five most conservative members took that sensible idea and ran with it; they suggested privatizing the entire system by allowing individuals to invest the money themselves (a prospect that has Wall Street brokers panting).

At first blush the two ideas seem to differ only in degree. In fact, the difference is between having a Social Security system and not having one. Social Security is premised on human frailty: if everyone were smart enough to provide for his own retirement, we wouldn't need it. Privatization, on the other hand, assumes that individuals can invest their money more intelligently than the government. And some certainly can. Others will not be so lucky. Maybe one of the market's periodic downturns will hit just as they retire. Or maybe they'll sink all their money into Cousin Ernie's sure-fire Bolivian copper mine. In any case, privatization would end Social Security's guarantee of a certain retirement.

Privatization's appeal rests on seductively simple math: if everyone took the money they paid into Social Security, which the trust fund invests in Treasury bills (which historically yield about 2 percent above the rate of inflation), and instead put it into the stock market (about 7 percent), Social Security's financial crisis disappears with the magic of compound interest. Everybody gets rich!

Sold yet? Well, think again. The privatizers slyly meld two separate and unrelated reforms: (1) Breaking up the Social Security trust fund into individual accounts, and (2) investing it all in private equities. The first transforms Social Security from a guaranteed retirement income into a sink-or-swim venture. This has nothing to do with stopping Social Security's red ink. The trust fund could just as well dump all its Treasury bonds and put everything in the market—that's reform #2—*without* letting everyone control their own account. Conservatives don't advocate this because it's too risky. But why should the government encourage people to assume a risk that it's not willing to take?

Surely, under a privatized system, some people would keep a portion of their savings in ultrasafe investments. But in addition to the near certainty that some poor saps will go broke, privatization carries the possibility that nearly everybody will go broke. Right now, the risk of a stock market crash falls upon those who, for the most part, can afford to gamble. If you dramatically spread ownership under privatization, you raise the stakes.

Privatizers also play another shell game. If everyone put their payroll taxes into individual accounts, there'd be no money left to pay today's retirees. So privatizers would cover that cost, in part, by raising payroll taxes, a regressive levy that's already too high. But again, if you could simply raise more tax money and pour it into the current system, Social Security's long-run deficits would all but disappear. The tricks that make privatization work don't require privatization.

Democrats opened the door to the privatizers by letting the accounting imbalance fester for years. Now they need to face up to this looming disaster. Fixing Social Security does not have to be excessively painful. All it takes is a few accounting tweaks. And, in the end, Social Security has far less to fear from its accounting deficiencies than it does from the privatizers riding to its rescue. •

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NOTEBOOK

NEWT NEWS: The day before the precarious House vote on whether Newt Gingrich would retain his speakership, GOP leaders waxed Napoleonic: "We are not looking at contingency plans—we are looking at winning," swaggered Louisiana Representative Robert Livingston. "At the end of the day, this will work out fine," said a more circumspect John Kasich, the Budget Committee chairman. And, for the time being, it did. Newt emerged from the meeting with enough votes to retain his post, waved at the crowd and said the showdown had been "fun." Well, we hate to poop the party, but it's all far from over. Still to come are the full Ethics Committee hearings on the Gingrich charges, which fence sitters have said may prompt them to support a dump-Newt push. And they will get plenty of prompting. The details independent counsel James Cole will present to the committee suggest something more than a case of ethical "jaywalking," as conservative pundits have dismissively characterized the Gingrich charges. There is, for instance, mounting evidence that Gingrich's protestations of naïveté about "arcane" tax code laws applying to charitable organizations is disingenuous (although we must thank the Speaker for his contribution to the corpus of scoundrel-time excuses; the idea that arcana in law is a justification for chicanery in office was inspired). As *The Washington Post* reported, the IRS had informed Gingrich as far back as 1989 that groups with partisan interests cannot accept tax-deductible donations, which is exactly what Gingrich's college course did. And other serious ethics questions, including whether GOPAC illegally acted as a political slush fund for Gingrich, remain unresolved. Despite last week's triumph, so does Newt's fate.

U.S. GOOD NEWS & WORLD REPORT: Inveighing against "the limited curiosity of journalism," James Fallows, the editor of *U.S. News & World Report* and an elder in the congregation of civic journalism, has produced a special issue of his magazine devoted to good news. "When they have good news to serve up," Fallows writes, "they [journalists] often feel compelled to do so in a condescending and cutesy way." They prefer problems to solutions. "Perhaps journalists are reluctant to write about solutions because they no longer believe in them." And so we have a magazine in which reporters were asked by their editor to propose and to cover a "solution" on their beat. The issue is called "20 Ways to Save the World" and it answers a question that has been torturing the journalistic community, which is what would happen when the civic journalism dear to Fallows's heart met the service journalism dear to the heart of his new magazine. "20 Ways to Save the World" is the service feature to end all service features. What are those 20 paths to salvation? They include: deputizing an international constabulary of Gurkhas ("Want peacekeepers with spine? Hire the world's fiercest mercenaries"), improving baseball ("add a time clock," "limit warm-up throws," "shorten mound meetings"), charging tolls on commuter highways, taxing entertainment to support art, mapping crimes on computers, promoting electric scooters, ending celibacy for priests ... well, you get the idea. Little things treated as big things (or what the Clinton campaign liked to call "targeted cuts"), and big things treated as little things. This is what happens when wonks think messianically. But the things that are wrong in America—no, in "the world"—are not all little things, and they will not all be solved by tinkering. These are not solutions to problems; these are problems shallowly considered by people who mistake earnestness for seriousness and have a horror of bad feeling. Coming next in the weekly organ of civic-service journalism: The 20 Best HMO-Coffee Bars and What Government Can Do to Make Them Better, and Is Your Skim Milk Really Skimmed?

ABU NOSTRADAMUS: A political problem may be treated by politics, but not a cultural problem. Culture is thicker and even less hospitable to reason than politics. And so the comic news from Ramallah that Ethan Bronner reported in *The Boston Globe* on January 6 is really tragi-comic. There is a new best-seller on the West Bank. It is called *The Annihilation of Israel in 2022: Divine Promise or Numeric Coincidence?* It is a crackpot—forgive us, an arcane—exercise in numerology, assisted by the counting of words and letters in the Koran and by certain conversions between the lunar Islamic calendar and the solar Gregorian calendar, with special reference to the role of Halley's Comet in Jewish history, all with the aim of proving that Israel will last only seventy-six years. The far-seeing author of the book, a Hamas operative who is described by Hamas's spokesman as (in Bronner's words) "one of the era's most important thinkers," has discovered that the key to the interpretation of Jewish history is the number 19. (What is it about the number 19 that attracts a certain sort of exegete? It was the subject, remember, of Minister Farrakhan's sermon on the Mall.) The book is selling by the tens of thousands. Its author explains that "the recent behavior of Israel makes people feel that it doesn't want peace.... So people want the monster to die." Nice. Of course, the book has its critics. A prominent Muslim clergyman in Jerusalem protests (again, in Bronner's words) that "counting words and letters is a Jewish tradition, not a Muslim one" (uh-huh) and also that the calculation of the end will make Palestinians passive. "They will step aside and wait for something to happen," the mullah told the reporter, "rather than take matters into their own hands." With critics like these....

WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE: In Andrew Delbanco's essay in last week's issue, the correct title of the book under review should have been *The Collected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, not *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. Our apologies. •

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Peru's prison wars.

HARD TIME

By Charles Lane

It has been, at the time of this writing, twenty-one days since the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement crashed Emperor Akihito's birthday party at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima and took more than 500 hostages. Still in possession of seventy-four hostages, MRTA (as the movement is acronymically known) was demanding the release of 400 members of its organization who are currently behind bars. It is notable, though, that the hostage-takers have hinted they may settle for an improvement in their comrades' prison conditions, which their leader, Nestor Cerpa Cartolini, likens to "a slow death penalty."

Life for jailed terrorists in Peru is indeed not so different from a slow death. Victor Polay, MRTA's founder, has been rotting in solitary confinement beneath a Peruvian naval base since his capture in 1992. So has Abimael Guzman, the erstwhile boss of the Maoist organization Shining Path. When the parents of Lori Berenson, an American convicted of helping MRTA plan a takeover of Peru's Congress, visited her in Yanamayo Prison—Peru's Siberia—they found her suffering from circulatory and respiratory ailments brought on by extreme altitude and cold temperatures. The Berensons were lucky. Normally, prisoners are allowed no visitors during the first year of their sentence; after that, they get thirty minutes per month with their families, plus thirty minutes of exercise in the prison yard per day. Food is scarce and barely edible.

MRTA's crusade on behalf of its imprisoned membership has already achieved one of its aims: to garner sympathy from the American media. *The New York Times*'s editorial page, for example, decries MRTA's hostage-taking methods but says "their diagnosis of prison life in Peru is on the mark." Is it, though? A distinction must be made. On the one hand, there are the violent, insalubrious jails for common criminals, which MRTA is not protesting. On the other hand, there is the harsh regimen faced by what the group calls "our prisoners"—those imprisoned for terrorism—which MRTA *is* protesting. Conditions for common criminals, as the *Times* rightly notes, are the inexcusable result of official corruption and neglect. The draconian confinement of the terrorists, however, has a rational basis. President Alberto Fujimori's resort to rigid incarceration for MRTA, and the even more dangerous Shining Path, was a drastic but defensible response to the multi-front terrorist campaign which, by the time of Fujimori's election in 1990, was dangerously close to turning Peru into the Lebanon of South America—or the Kampuchea.

In the long, vicious struggle between Peru's terrorists and its government, the battle for the prisons has become a proxy for the war at large. If the state now runs its jails ruthlessly, it is largely because the terrorists used to do so themselves. To understand this phenomenon, you have to go back to the 1980s, when Shining Path, a group inspired by the Cultural Revolution in China, launched its Prolonged Popular War in the mountainous province of Ayacucho. The counterinsurgency battle was assigned to the national police, but Peru's criminal justice system was soon overwhelmed by the brazenness and magnitude of Shining Path's violent campaign. The courts and prisons were especially vulnerable. Shining Path quickly let it be known that it would kill any judge who sent a terrorist to jail, or any guard who tried to keep him there. One early result was a spectacular massive jail break in Ayacucho in 1982, Shining Path's first national propaganda coup.

But soon Shining Path found it could operate just as well, or even better, from inside the jails. Thanks to bribes and threats, and well-orchestrated public campaigns for better prison conditions, the imprisoned terrorists were able to win absurdly liberal concessions. In short order, Shining Path and, later, MRTA, had converted their cell blocks into liberated territory—no-go zones for guards where young guerrilla recruits were indoctrinated and given clandestine military training. (The World Wide Web site of Shining Path's U.S. support committee, www.csrp.org, contains 1991 photos of Shining Path members in crisp olive-drab uniforms, marching under a red banner in the exercise yard of Lima's maximum-security Canto Grande prison.) Shining Path prisoners cooked their own food, which entitled them to possess such potential weapons as knives and cooking gas. At El Frontón, an Alcatraz-like island prison off the coast of Lima, inmates even negotiated to go swimming in the Pacific.

From these safe havens, the terrorists planned armed actions, communicating with comrades on the outside via lawyers, friends and family members who shuttled information and orders back and forth during visits. In June 1986, on the eve of a meeting in Lima of the Socialist International, hundreds of Shining Path inmates at three Lima-area maximum security prisons—El Frontón, Lurigancho and the Santa Barbara women's prison—staged a coordinated uprising in their cell blocks. Within hours, they had seized complete control of all three prisons, using knives, spears, acid bombs and crossbows fashioned from cooking utensils and other materials smuggled in by their visitors, as well as guns taken from their guards. Simultaneous bombings throughout Lima left the government groping desperately for control. Panicked, then-President Alan Garcia unleashed the Peruvian armed forces. It took gunboats, helicopters, artillery and special forces to quell the revolt. When it was over, Peruvian troops lined up more than 100 captured prisoners and executed them.

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Even this disaster didn't inspire fundamental change in prison policies. As recently as 1990, some forty-seven MRTA members, including Victor Polay, were able to tunnel out of Canto Grande, aided once again by their contacts with sympathizers on the outside. The intimidation of judges and the porousness of the prisons were major reasons that Peruvian soldiers and police so often killed captured terror suspects in cold blood. Officers would order their troops to carry out extrajudicial executions rather than turn their prisoners over to the courts, on the grounds that even those few suspects who were convicted would soon be right back on the street.

Fujimori began to change all that in April, 1992, when he seized temporary near-dictatorial powers in a "self-coup" supported by the armed forces. One of his first acts was to send the military into the Shining Path cell blocks at Canto Grande. After a four-day pitched battle similar to the 1986 carnage, the terrorists were finally subdued. Fujimori moved terrorism cases from civilian courts to the now-notorious military star chamber where judges wear hoods and the accused are not allowed to challenge the evidence presented against them. These trials are a mockery of due process—but they have ended the intimidation of judges. Fujimori also instituted the tightly controlled prison regimen of solitary confinement and near-zero visitation, and began shipping terrorism prisoners to the new penitentiary in windswept Yanamayo. There, life is hell for the incarcerated—but prison riots and escapes are a thing of the past.

The situation in Peru's prisons, then, is not a simple tale of yet another Latin government oppressing those guilty of what the *Times* calls "political crimes." It is, rather, part of a broader and morally more complicated story of how an incipient, impoverished democracy dealt with fanatical, violent groups bent on exploiting democratic freedoms in order to destroy democracy. Peruvians themselves seem to comprehend this. The trampling of prisoners' rights in the name of order caused no reduction in Fujimori's popularity. Quite the contrary. He was re-elected by a wide margin over former U.N. Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar in 1995, largely because the public liked his crackdown on the guerrillas. Even many Peruvian and international human rights monitors concede that criticism of Fujimori's methods has to be tempered by an acknowledgment of the extraordinary threat that Peruvian society faced.

It must also be tempered by the fact that Peru's guerrillas were battling elected governments, Fujimori's included, which allowed ample space for non-violent left-wing political participation. Shining Path launched its war on Peru's Election Day, 1980, as the armed forces were handing power back to an elected civilian for the first time in twelve years. MRTA didn't shift into high gear until 1985, when Garcia, a social democrat (and former Sorbonne roommate of Victor Polay), took office.

As the terrorist threat waned in recent months, Fujimori was beginning to heed outside human rights pressure. In 1993, he agreed to permit the International Red Cross to visit terrorism prisoners and monitor their condition. But MRTA's latest attack prompted Fujimori to suspend both ICRC and family visits. Now there is little chance he will ease prison conditions. Such a move would only encourage still-dangerous remnants of Shining Path to try a spectacular hostage-taking of their own. It seems that no matter how MRTA is finally dislodged from the luxurious confines of the Japanese ambassador's residence, the guerrillas' desperate stunt will probably only make life worse for their comrades in the cold, dark cells of Peru's prisons. •

A looming housing crisis and how to fix it.

THE UNHOUSED

By Richard Ravitch

This country faces a housing crisis of growing proportions. Record numbers of Americans are paying over half their pre-tax income for shelter, and the figure is rising. Historically, the nation has managed to confront such crises only with help from government programs. Yet today one of the federal government's most important housing efforts, the Section 8 program, faces an epic financial crisis, one similar to the thrift industry debacle of the last decade, but with a much more dramatic potential for human misery.

Through long-term contracts, the Section 8 program subsidizes several million residents at a cost of $6.5 billion per year. Most of these contracts are for twenty years, which means that in the next few years large numbers of them will expire. If Congress renews the contracts for another twenty-five years on the same terms, the cost is likely to be more than $200 billion. Yet, if they are not renewed, the landlords' mortgages will default. Since the mortgages are insured by the federal government, taxpayers will bear the burden—on the order of $18.5 billion in the short term, along with the long-term cost of housing the millions who now occupy Section 8 housing. Section 8 is like a Chinese finger puzzle that tightens as you try to escape. If the program is not somehow made financially sound, though, there is virtually no chance of new federal initiatives to meet housing needs.

The Section 8 program as it exists today is a refinement of years of policy experimentation. In the 1930s, the federal government promoted housing in straightforward ways. It reimbursed state and local housing authorities for the costs of bonds they issued to build public housing. It also established the Federal Housing

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Administration, the FHA, to create more liquidity in the mortgage market by insuring most mortgages on homes and multi-family dwellings. For years these programs worked well. But by the 1950s, with big cities deteriorating and middle-class families fleeing to the suburbs, these initiatives were no longer enough to maintain livable housing in the urban core. Over the next two decades, the federal government tried to stem the flight from the cities with loans, subsidies and tax breaks; but these efforts were stymied by inflation, budgeting quirks and the sheer size of the housing problem.

Section 8 of the Nixon administration's 1974 housing act was designed to overcome these obstacles, and for a time it did. Under Section 8, run by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), construction of new apartments would be financed primarily through forty-year mortgages supplied by private lenders; the FHA would encourage lenders by insuring the mortgages. Low- and moderate-income tenants who qualified for the program would have to pay 30 percent of their income in rent. Apartment owners and HUD would agree on the operating costs of a project; the government would then make up the difference between costs and rent revenues. With HUD's approval, subsidies would increase as costs rose.

Unfortunately this plan was vulnerable to the law of unintended consequences. The guarantee that subsidies would rise along with costs provided little incentive to develop or operate projects efficiently. At first, that drawback posed no great problems for the program; it was offset by the fact that Section 8 was not initially aimed at very poor people. The program's limit on tenant income was high enough to let owners fill their projects mainly with lower-middle-income tenants, who required relatively small subsidies. Section 8 did not help the poorest; but those who received aid needed it, and the cost was modest compared with what followed.

Unfortunately, that equilibrium did not last. At the start of the Reagan years, ideological politics entered the picture. Newly empowered activists on the right saw a chance to eliminate housing subsidies altogether—but were willing to settle for axing subsidies to the middle class. Activists on the left, meanwhile, argued for an expansion of these same subsidies but were willing to settle for focusing aid more exclusively on the neediest. Working in the bureaucracies, on the Hill and through interest groups, they formed an alliance that succeeded in amending Section 8 to force projects to give preference to the poorest applicants.

As a result, by the late 1980s, Section 8 projects housed mostly very low-income residents. These new demographics plus inflation forced subsidies upward to a level higher than anything foreseen in 1974. Today, because of HUD's reimbursement system, the total rent at many of these projects is well above the market-level rents for unsubsidized apartments. If federal subsidies were taken away and apartment owners were able to charge only market-level rents, few—if any—owners would be able to cover their mortgage payments. And if the mortgages default, it is the FHA, which insured them for forty years, that will be left holding the bag.

How could government have underwritten forty-year mortgages on projects whose lifeblood, their federal subsidy, was guaranteed for only twenty years? If subsidies ended and rents rose to above 30 percent of tenants' income, how were poorer tenants supposed to make their rent? If they couldn't afford the new rents, was it really possible, let alone decent, to evict them? If they were not evicted, how would landlords cope? Obvious as these questions now seem, there is no evidence that policymakers asked them twenty years ago and no consensus on how to answer them today. Fortunately, it is still possible to save Section 8, preserving the virtues of the housing policy it produced without stepping on so many toes or incurring such high costs as to make it politically impossible.

To thread our way through the thicket, we should outline the features of a solution that would best serve the public interest. First, the new and improved Section 8 must preserve the program's housing stock. Many Section 8 projects already lack funds to maintain themselves in decent repair. We should not make the problem worse. Second, on grounds of fairness, tenants now subsidized by Section 8 should not lose their apartments unless they have access to comparable alternatives. Third, the cost to taxpayers must be minimized; otherwise they will not consent to continuing Section 8, let alone to launching new housing programs. Fourth, these projects must be put into the hands of organizations, for-profit or nonprofit, that have the skill, access to capital and track records to make Section 8 housing and its neighborhoods better to live in and more economically sound. Finally, the changes in Section 8 must be seen as equitable, allocating burdens fairly among owners, tenants and the government.

These criteria clearly make it impossible to extend Section 8, as some advocate, with only minor changes. Nor should we simply end Section 8 overnight: that would do nothing to preserve housing stock or deal with current tenants. If Congress decides, as seems likely, not to continue Section 8 subsidies at current levels, most of the FHA-insured mortgages will default. If and when they do, HUD can use the defaults to rearrange the program's incentives.

In the first place, HUD should enter into new, long-term subsidy contracts for these properties—long enough to pay off whatever is left of the restructured mortgages. Some policymakers would rather use a year-to-year approach, providing only annual subsidies or rent vouchers for tenants. This kind of band-aid strategy has the advantage of masking the budgetary effect of any expenditures; but long-term contracts allow more flexibility, and thus lower costs, in financing.

In most cases the government will have to reduce the projects' indebtedness. Just as important, the FHA will have to decide what to do with the mortgages it controls. It could sell the mortgages to the highest bidder at a fraction of their potential value, but this would do nothing to fulfill the purposes of the housing program. A better idea is for government to work these mortgages in

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partnership with private organizations, for-profit developers or nonprofit housing management organizations—to designate as mortgage owners those who seem best able to cooperate with HUD in achieving the goals of the new Section 8. The new mortgage holders can then negotiate with project owners for changes such as cost reductions, capital improvements and capital contributions. Sometimes these negotiations would end with ownership and management of a project staying the same. Other properties might be transferred to more suitable owners. In a few cases, uneconomical projects could be closed or converted to other uses.

Most important, government would share in the returns that private mortgage holders, owners and managers produce. To this end, government should require changes that improve efficiency, so that taxpayers' burden will diminish over time. Vacant apartments should be rented to people who need a lower subsidy. More rigorous reviews must ensure that tenants pay an appropriate percentage of their actual income as rent. Government should use project audits by independent auditors to set an appropriate basis for subsidies. Where no profit limits for owners exist, government should institute them.

If owners and their investors do stay in possession of a project, they are naturally entitled to benefit from the profit and from the postponement of the time when their tax benefits are reversed. By the same token, though, they should be required to contribute fresh capital to the project, with the amount related to the size of their tax benefit. When the owners make this payment, they should get an explicit guarantee that at the end of their new twenty-year contract, or some other reasonable period, they will be free to operate their projects in the open market.

This package is not neat or ideologically satisfying. It does not fully protect property owners and does not insulate tenants from rent increases. But Section 8 contracts are expiring now, and any reform of the program must take place within today's constraints. If the federal government cannot deal prudently with Section 8, it will not have the credibility needed to launch successor programs; and if there are no such programs, government will be unable to play the necessary role of helping to make decent housing available to the increasing number of Americans who will otherwise be unable to afford it.

RICHARD RAVITCH is a former chairman of the New York State Urban Development Corporation.

Behind the city's falling murder rate.

NEW YORK STORY

By James Traub

New York City finished 1996 with 983 murders. The last time New York had fewer than 1,000 murders was 1968; the city had more than 2,000 only four years ago. The drop in the city's crime rate over the last few years has been so drastic that it has accounted for fully one-third of the total national reduction in crime. These figures represent a stunning vindication of the policing philosophy that Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and his former police commissioner, William Bratton, introduced in 1994. They also call into question a central assumption of both the liberal and the conservative approach to crime—the idea that the only way to make a serious reduction in crime is to address its root causes. Liberals and conservatives have shared this view for years, disagreeing only on the question of what the root cause is. For liberals, crime results from the despair induced by poverty, unemployment and poor schooling. Conservatives blame "moral poverty"—the effect on the underclass of the collapse of the moral guidance that once came from families, churches and the larger culture.

Over the course of this fall, I spent a fair amount of time in Washington Heights, a neighborhood in upper Manhattan widely known as the crack capital of New York, and perhaps of the country. I went in the company of a police officer named Odanel ("Otto") Irias, who walks a beat that runs from 162nd to 167th Street, and from Broadway on the west to Edgecombe Avenue on the east. Officer Irias's beat is considered one of the most drug-ravaged zones in the area. The first time I accompanied him, we paid a visit to 505 West 162nd, the most notorious address in Washington Heights. In the summer of 1992, in this large red-brick apartment building, one of the city's worst riots in memory began when a police officer pursued a man he believed, correctly, to be a drug dealer into the building's lobby and shot and killed him. Within a few days, police cars were burning, and young men were hurling chunks of con-

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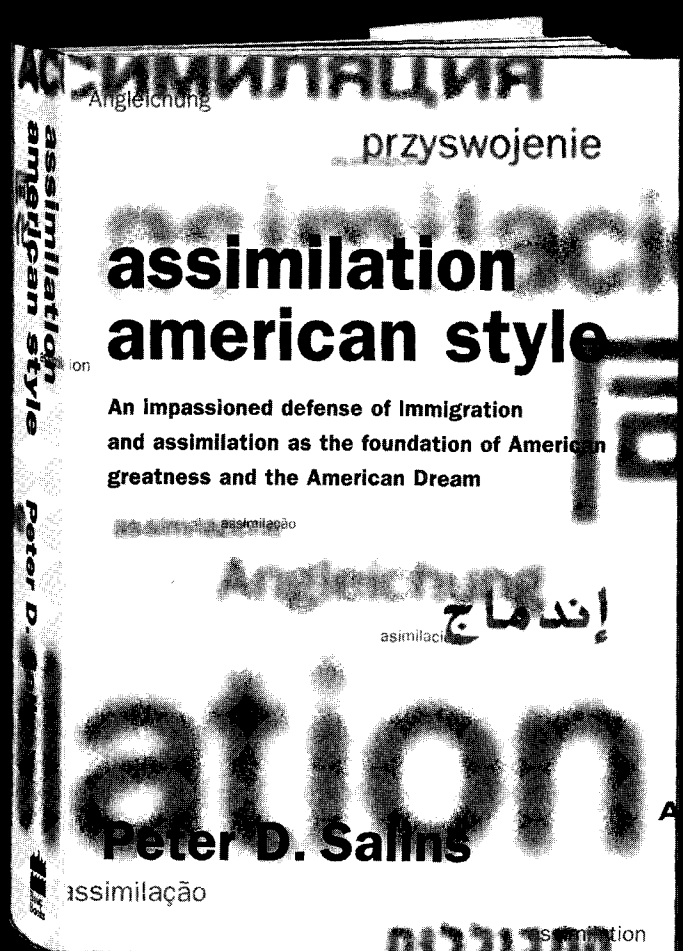
WHY IS IMMIGRATION VITAL TO AMERICA'S FUTURE?

Social scientist Peter Salins presents a lucid and powerfully persuasive argument for preserving and encouraging immigration to our shores. Countering the claims of nativists and multiculturalists alike, Salins shows that the history of America is a history of different ethnic groups forging a new national identity, and argues that abandoning this process now will undermine the prosperity and social cohesion that sets us apart from the rest of the world.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crete off roofs. The disturbance gave the horrifying impression that the balance of power in the neighborhood had passed into the hands of the dealers themselves. In the lobby, we met a young woman who had lived in the building most of her life. She and Officer Irias began reminiscing about the Wild West era of the late '80s and early '90s.

"Remember that killing they had across the street?" said the woman, who declined to give her name. "It was that 14-year-old girl, and they cut her throat and then"—she broke into Spanish in order to ask Officer Irias about the proper English phrase. "They cut her head off?" he asked. "Yeah, they cut her head off," she confirmed.

Things at 505 are still bad. The dealers still treat the building with the insolent impunity of owners, routinely breaking the lock on the front door. But the baroque violence is a thing of the past. In 1992, the year of the riots, Washington Heights had ninety-eight murders. There were thirty-nine in 1996. In the 33rd precinct, where Irias works, crime has fallen 36 percent over the last two years. On my last visit in mid-December, Inspector Joanne Jaffe, the commanding officer of the 33rd, told me that the precinct hadn't recorded a murder in three months, though she all but knocked on wood as she said it.

Washington Heights has undergone the same evolution that most neighborhoods in New York have, only more extremely. Throughout much of this century, the Heights was a self-contained working- and middle-class neighborhood with large apartment buildings and a few blocks of elegant brownstones. The area was transformed by two almost simultaneous events in the mid-1980s—the introduction of crack cocaine and mass migration from the Dominican Republic. Location is as important to the drug trade as to any other business. Washington Heights, which offers instant access to New Jersey as well as Westchester and the Bronx, was perfectly situated to serve as a regional hub for both wholesale and retail drug operations. The Dominican immigration revitalized the neighborhood's commercial areas and filled its schools and churches; it also provided a continual influx of impoverished and ill-educated young men who were ready recruits to the drug business.

In the early '90s, Washington Heights was a giant, open-air drug mart. Customers drove over the George Washington Bridge and lined up to buy drugs, as if at a McDonald's take-out window. Drug gangs slaughtered one another over control of tiny slivers of territory. The 1992 riots had the fortunate effect of making the police pay closer attention to the area. A long-standing plan to divide the giant 34th precinct, which covered all of Manhattan north of 155th Street, was accelerated, and in October, 1994, the 33rd was born. Officer Irias, who had spent the first three years of his police career in the 34th, was transferred to the 33rd, owing in part to a conscious campaign to staff the new precinct with Spanish-speaking officers. Suddenly there were almost twice as many officers in the blocks covered by the precinct; and they began making headway.

Otto Irias's career in the 33rd offers a guide, in miniature, to the tactics the police have used in recent years to win back the streets. He spent his first fourteen months with the "condition unit," which focuses on the quality-of-life issues that Mayor Giuliani and Commissioner Bratton made the starting point of enforcement tactics. Every time he walked past a knot of men drinking beer in front of a bodega, Irias would issue a summons that could lead to a court appearance and a fine. "Pretty soon," he says, "there's nobody urinating in the streets, because nobody's drinking beer. You don't get so much loud noise and disruption. You take care of the little things, and the big things take care of themselves. Say you have four guys drinking in the street. All of a sudden, here comes a fight, here comes a knife, here comes a gun, here comes a body. But if they know you're going to be around, they'll watch themselves." Irias was also authorized to pat down anyone to whom he had issued a summons, even for a minor infraction. This focus on weapons has probably done more to reduce the murder rate than any other single tactic. Once you start leaving your gun at home, you're less likely to kill somebody in a fight.

Last year, Officer Irias was moved to the community policing unit. He is a big believer in what he calls "omnipresence;" a large part of his job is just to walk around the neighborhood, showing the flag and talking to people in stores or on the street. But Giuliani and Bratton also broadened the focus of community policing from "problem-solving" to disrupting street crime and specifically the drug trade. (In fact, after the Knapp Commission uncovered serious police corruption in the late 1970s, it was alleged that cops on the street were instructed not to make drug arrests, in order to avoid the temptation of drugs and cash.) Irias knows where to look for drugs, and he finds them stashed in garbage pails, telephone booths, the rim of a car roof. He has contacts who supply him with discreet tips about the dealers' whereabouts. Otto Irias is the kind of exceedingly polite young man—he's 30—who never fails to doff his blue cap when he enters a restaurant or store, at least one whose owner he respects. But he likes to unsettle the local dealers with impromptu, pointed chats—personalized versions of omnipresence. As we were walking eastward on 163rd Street one night in November, Irias went up to a slight young man in a brown leather jacket and Yankee cap and said, "Where you been, bro?" The man mumbled something, and Irias persisted. "I haven't seen you in a long time. You been away?"

"On vacation."

"Where at, Rikers?" The young man and a large friend laughed mirthlessly. "You look good, bro," said Irias. "Don't go fucking up again, okay?" The guy promised not to. "He likes to steer people into buildings," Irias said as we walked away. "And he likes to smoke a lot of marijuana."

On the most notorious streets on Officer Irias's beat, drugs are sold in practically every building. One day he took me on a tour of 163rd Street between Amsterdam and Broadway, one of the most menacing stretches in the precinct. "520 and 530," he said, pointing to two small apartment buildings on the south side of the

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street, "they sell a lot of marijuana and cocaine in there. 532, they sell cocaine. 536, they're mostly dealing marijuana. Now, these two buildings"—Irias pointed to numbers 548 and 552, which were singled out in a *New York Times* series on grossly substandard housing—"are very famous. If we weren't here, there'd be twenty guys standing out in front of the lobby. As soon as you come by, they all run into the grocery over there."

Irias took me into a storefront that contained a few video games manned by teenagers and five booths for long-distance telephoning, all of them empty. Inventory consisted of about a dozen boxes of Pampers. "This place is a front," he said. "I'm pretty sure they sell drugs in the back." Nearby was a crowded pool hall, and we walked inside. "That guy over there sells marijuana," Irias said, well within the guy's earshot. "This guy I arrested last week." They all kept their heads down, bent as if with intense concentration over their pool cues. I bought a candy bar from a man seated behind a glass wall. The Snickers was nearly a fossil, white and fissured and as hard as old clay; I must have been the first person to make a purchase in six months. When I threw it out, the salesman, with a nervous eye on Irias, begged me to take my fifty cents back.

Like most cops, Officer Irias is a skeptic. He does not believe police enforcement, no matter how intense, can cripple the drug business in Washington Heights. "There's a demand for it," he says. "People will keep coming back for it." Both the appetite for drugs and the profit to be made from selling them represent forces too powerful to be overwhelmed by the prospect of punishment.

This is not, of course, the official view of the NYPD, and in early September the police, along with a wide range of federal agencies, began a long-term initiative designed to break up the hundred or so drug gangs in Washington Heights and upper Harlem. The initiative has put an additional 600 policemen on the streets. Their presence has so disrupted the drug trade that Officer Irias can scarcely find drugs on his beat, much less drug transactions. "There's definitely much less dealing on the street," he observes; "it may have just moved inside." Officer Irias is not convinced that the volume of sales has actually diminished.

Nevertheless, he doesn't consider enforcement futile. What enforcement can do, he argues, is reduce the violence, disorder and terror spawned by drug trafficking; it can make places like 505 West 162nd less terrifying. "I can tell there's a difference because people will come to me on the street and talk to me," Irias says. "Before, they were afraid to even be seen with me, because they were worried that the dealers would say they were cooperating."

That sounds like a pretty modest achievement, but it doesn't feel that way to the people along Officer Irias's beat. Andres Linares, the owner of the Bug Off Pest Control Center at St. Nicholas between 164th and 165th and a lifelong resident of the Heights, says, "Double- and triple-parking used to be a common thing two or three years ago; now it's not. It sounds goofy, but it does give you a gauge of control, that there is authority, there is order. You don't see the mobs on the street. It used to be that if you wanted to walk across this block, you'd zigzag, because you'd have a concentration of mooks on each corner and in the middle of the block." Linares, who watched a gangland-style execution take place right outside his store about five years ago, says he can now walk on cross streets that he used to avoid. Jose Lopez, owner of Joe's Pizza at 166th and St. Nicholas, says that in earlier years he had to close the grate over the windows during Halloween to protect his customers from flying objects. "Now for the past year, two years, things have calmed down," he says. "We were able to operate normally for the first time this year."

There is a liberal shibboleth which holds that ghetto communities view the police as an invading army. The anti-drug initiative, which has filled the streets with officers from distant parts of the city, would seem to offer the perfect test of that theory. But the only complaints about the program I heard were from the guys hanging around the pool tables. Victor Morisete, the executive director of the Community Association of Progressive Dominicans, a group that works with young people and recent immigrants, says, "Everybody I know of welcomes this new initiative with open arms." Most people in Washington Heights look to the police to protect them from the drug dealers and the customers, whom they regard as the real occupying force.

The problem with root-cause liberalism is not that it offers an implausible account of the origins of inner-city crime. It is rather that it stigmatizes the idea of law enforcement by insisting that inner-city criminals are the true victims of crime—of the poverty and social disorganization that drove them to crime. In fact, impoverished communities are full of people who manage to lead lawful and gainful lives, despite poverty and bad schools, housing and health care. They, of course, are the victims of crime, and they are the beneficiaries of police action. You can read through such recent texts as Michael Tonry's *Malign Neglect: Race, Crime and Punishment in America*, or Diana R. Gordon's *The Return of the Dangerous Classes* without coming across more than a few cursory words about these innocent bystanders, perhaps because their very presence implies that even poor people can master their circumstances, and thus that there is a meaningful element of personal choice in pursuing a life of crime. And if crime is a choice, then tough enforcement and punishment are not necessarily racist; nor do they represent, as Gordon would have it, a "shadow agenda item of taming the untamed." It is in fact precisely because drug dealers and muggers are not simply impelled by overwhelming social forces—but, like other people, respond rationally to changes in circumstances—that concentrated police action can alter their behavior.

The police can't change the dynamic that makes places like Washington Heights ripe for violent crime; that is, after all, the central unfulfilled task of modern liberalism. But they can change criminal behavior far more than most of us have thought likely; and for besieged communities that is very good news indeed. •

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The gospel of Saints Paul, Warren and Pete.

HOLY TRINITY

By Stephen Glass

The thing everyone remembers about Susan's one-bedroom Chicago apartment is the large portrait of the messianic man with the wise, sorrowful eyes, eyes that look deep into your sinning soul. The portrait's wooden frame looks too heavy for her sagging walls, but Susan likes it because it reminds her of the frames on the Old Masters that hang in Chicago's Art Institute. Attached to the frame is a gold plate engraved with the name of the sorrowful figure, and the date of his birth. The name on the plate is Paul Tsongas.

Susan's portrait of Paul is not great art. She had it made by enlarging Tsongas's latest book jacket, and the result is grainy and somewhat out of focus. On Susan's most recent birthday, her grandchildren gave her a clearer picture, already sized to fit her favorite frame. The new picture hangs, less prominently, in the kitchen. Susan says she likes the first one best because Tsongas's eyes are intense, his hair tousled, and his sleeves are rolled up. "I told them that this was a picture of the man at work saving the country," she says in an earnest voice. "No one has a picture of Moses just laying around posing, everyone has him lifting up the Commandments. Well, I, too, have the U.S. of A.'s savior busy at work."

Susan is an 80-year-old widow. She had hip surgery five years ago, and since then she has spent most of her time indoors. Until two years ago, she had never shown much interest in politics and government. She subscribed to *The Chicago Tribune* to read Ann Landers and the "Tempo" section. She had voted for president only once, in 1960; she can't remember if she picked Kennedy or Nixon. Each morning, she woke up early, spent most of her day watching soap operas and talking to her three cats—Larry, Moe and Curley. Each night, after cleaning the dishes, she read romance novels in bed until she fell asleep. But on March 1, 1994, all that changed. Intrigued that "Larry King Live" was promising to talk about the British royal family's new mail-order catalog, Susan decided to stay awake past 8 p.m. "But Larry took forever to get to Prince Michael," she recalls. "Beforehand, he had Paul [Tsongas] and Warren [Rudman] talking about their group, the Concord Coalition. All of a sudden I saw what was happening. Both parties working together. It must be on target. These men were going to save my children."

Susan became, at once, a convert, a deficit-hawk of unmatched zeal. She has written, by her own estimate, more than 900 letters to congressmen asking for Social Security and other entitlements to be curtailed. In her wallet next to photos of her grandchildren, she has a picture of Warren Rudman. She can tell you what the deficit will be at noon on all major holidays. She even renamed her cats: Paul, Warren and Pete (the last one named after Pete Peterson, the Concord Coalition's president). What does she do when she's bored? She tries to convert others. "I trick my friends into giving me the phone lists of their senior citizen homes and then I call everyone on the list," she says. (She adds a request that her last name not be used so she doesn't lose these friends.)

Ask Susan why the Concord Coalition's economic prescription is right and she'll automatically reply, "for our children." Probe deeper, "But, why for our children?" and she's stumped. She pauses. She "umms" a bit and says: "Can't you get it? We have both Republicans and Democrats who agree. That has to mean we're right."

Paul Tsongas, Warren Rudman and Pete Peterson founded the Concord Coalition in 1992, and the group has been growing ever since; currently, the coalition claims 170,000 "active members," or "shock troops" as Tsongas likes to call them. Many of these evangelical volunteers, like Susan, work as recruiters. They build mailing lists, speak to any group no matter how small, even visit high schools. The coalition's army of Susans has made it a force in politics. The force comes not just from the quantity of its supporters, but the quality. The group's active members are passionate and committed well beyond the norm in politics. They are followers of the teachings of Paul, Warren and Pete. It is not really a matter of politics or economics; it is a matter of faith.

And the volunteers aren't the only ones who approach the Concord Coalition as devotees. Reporters and editors make up many of the loudest voices in the group's amen corner. In the news pages, the coalition's press releases receive the most respectful of play. And editorialists greet the words of the coalition as very nearly received wisdom. Take *The Boston Herald*. On December 4, the paper's editorial board urged Americans to be cautious about changes in the consumer price index. On December 29, the paper threw caution

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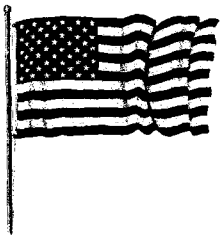

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to the wind and called for an immediate cut of 0.5 percent in the index and possibly more later. Why the change of heart? "As it so often does," explained the *Herald*, "the Concord Coalition has come up with a good idea." *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen offers another example of the coalition's power to impress itself upon the editorial mind. In June 1990, the liberal columnist urged, as he had many times before, that the Democrats protect "entitlements like Social Security that have been paying their own way." Two years later, he swooned over the newly formed Concord Coalition's bipartisanship and praised their "candor" about the importance of cutting entitlements. Even Philip K. Howard, author of the best-seller *The Death of Common Sense* and one of America's most prominent skeptics, falls hard for the Concord Coalition. "They're the exception," he says. "They have both parties and they aren't running for president. They're doing what they think is right. You trust them."

All of this started with the simple, natural desire of two out-of-work politicians to find themselves a little limelight again. In April, 1992, Warren Rudman and Paul Tsongas met for a late breakfast at the Colonial Inn in Concord, Massachusetts. They had just appeared in an interview on "Face the Nation" to discuss the deficit and discovered, according to Rudman's autobiography, that they had "a common passion." Soon they "hit on the idea of starting a grassroots organization to fight for a balanced budget." An early volunteer for the Concord Coalition who has worked for Republicans in the Senate suspects that Tsongas's and Rudman's drive had at least as much to do with staying relevant as it did with the cause of fiscal sanity. "Here were two guys who had always had the spotlight on them," he says. "Now, they're having coffee talking about how no one gives a shit what they have to say. Who cares what former politicians think?"

Both Tsongas and Rudman had long enjoyed the admiration of the press, and for the same reason. Both had made a career out of being the sort of politician that reporters find most useful, the sort who can be counted on to criticize his own party. They were forever finding their friends and colleagues falling short of one moral requirement or another. And they had nicely complementary styles: Tsongas spoke more in sorrow than in anger, Rudman very much the reverse. By and large, the press ate them up with a spoon. But then Rudman quit the Senate, and Tsongas bombed out of the Democratic primaries. Suddenly, the cameras were gone. Rudman found even his home audience lukewarm to his speeches. In February, 1992, Rudman was embarrassed at a New Hampshire rally for George Bush. The crowd applauded wildly for Arnold Schwarzenegger and, according to *The Washington Post*, was "almost as vigorous" for Barbara Bush, but when Rudman spoke they only "tepidly applauded." As one local journalist put it, "many started to leave."

It would not have been in character for either man to imagine that his country didn't need, let alone want, to hear him. In his chokingly narcissistic book *Journey of Purpose*, Tsongas writes of himself as a man destined for a great, historical mission—"Our task, indeed our moral imperative, is to bring purpose to our lives. And the only way to do that is to dedicate ourselves to the collective survival and well-being of our young, in our daily lives and in the life of our nation." And he makes clear how much public attention—adulation—means to him. He writes with palpable pain of the day he received the news that he was running at 2 percent in the polls in the Democratic primaries ("I had been running around the country for almost a year, trying to alert the nation to its economic peril against a hugely popular president, and it all added up to 2 percent.... I felt terribly aggrieved. I felt crushed.") And he writes with palpable joy of a later day when he learned that he was, very briefly, the frontrunner. ("Frontrunner! Frontrunner! ... I had endured with my principles intact and was on the verge of respectability at least, and victory at best.")

And Rudman, in *his* chokingly narcissistic book, *Combat*, is likewise an indispensable man. ("We can be great or we can have chaos. The choice is ours.... This is the combat we all must join, for ourselves, our children, our country and generations yet unborn.") He likewise displays a profound dislike for not being listened to. ("I'm angry at the entire government and to some extent I am unhappy with the American people for accepting the simplistic answers politicians are giving them," he says he explained when Jim Lehrer interviewed him on his decision to quit the Senate.)

In the months after their encounter, Rudman and Tsongas met with Peterson, an investment banker and Nixon's former commerce secretary, at a long breakfast in the Senate Dining Room and met again later in New York. They agreed, according to Peterson, to form the Concord Coalition, which would be relentlessly dedicated to two things: deficit cutting and bipartisanship. "The second part is most important," the longtime volunteer says. "Rudman and Tsongas are inextricably linked. Former Republicans and Democrats are a dime a dozen, but together they get credibility."

That summer Tsongas, Rudman and Peterson unveiled the Concord Coalition manifesto, a document that reads more like a religious text than a political treatise. Stuffed with war analogies, inspirational language, wisdom of the ancients (oddly including Alexander Hamilton, who famously defended federal deficits) and even a hymn, the pamphlet ends with seven consecutive one-sentence paragraphs: "Those are the stakes. That is the choice.... Together, we will act."

But there was somewhat less to the Concord manifesto than its apocalyptic rhetoric implied. And therein lay one reason for its popularity: although the manifesto calls throughout for "sacrifice" and "difficult choices" to cut the deficit, it never gets down to specifics. "The book works because everyone's for prudence and it doesn't kill anyone's program," explains Jon Simon, a volunteer Concord Coalition recruiter. "Give it to people and they'll be converted." A radio campaign plugging the manifesto generated more than

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10,000 calls a day to their toll-free number.

Oddly, the media didn't bite at first. *The New York Times* ignored the announcement. *The Washington Post* ran a story on page C7. Even Tsongas's home-state newspaper *The Boston Globe* didn't give it much play. "Tsongas became very frustrated," a prominent Massachusetts Concord Coalition member says. "He kept reading the papers, looking for a mention, but saw none."

Then, in May, 1995, the Concord Coalition released a seventy-five-page "Zero Deficit Plan." This was the masterstroke. The plan's graphs, charts and appendices seemed to answer critics who had said the group lacked substance. And the plan did propose a measure of real sacrifice: means-testing Social Security, cutting national defense, boosting the gas tax. Yet, it was still, carefully, not *too* insistent on that sacrifice. In the overview, it cautions readers: "There is no single 'right' way to reduce the deficit. [This plan] suggests one way." The book contains alternatives so each reader can come up with his or her own favorite way to balance the deficit. The budget crisis meets moral relativism.

But peddling virtue requires more than just a well-crafted line of chat. It requires peddlers. This was something else the Concord Coalition grasped early, and the group has always recruited aggressively, using tactics that, again, smack more of religious movements than political ones. Meet Bob Hannon.

After four years as a seminarian at Notre Dame, Hannon became frustrated with celibacy and dropped out. With little else to do, he volunteered for the Tsongas campaign in 1992 and later headed up the Concord Coalition's Illinois chapter. He quickly proved to be a great preacher for the cause. Like a modern-day rider on the Chautauqua circuit, he has spent the last four years traveling—first in Illinois and later in New England—and spreading the word that, as one Illinois member put it, "the end was nigh." Sometimes armed with a giant digital deficit clock that shows the continuously escalating deficit shooting skyward second by second, Hannon passes out tracts detailing two contrasting visions of the future: a Concordian heaven in which "the American Dream" flourishes and a state defined by the "cancer" of hellish ignorance and plagued by anemic growth.

"I would speak at any group that would listen to me," Hannon says proudly. "I was always ready to go." He learned to speak in the language of fiscal fire and brimstone, an antidote to the fact that, as he readily admits, the budget can be "an eyes-glaze-over" issue. The president of one fraternal organization says Hannon terrified the group's older members by invoking a bleak future and warning that their children would never find decent paying jobs; then he'd "lift" them by showing smiling photos of Tsongas and Rudman. In Chicago, Hannon's group began a public speaking club that teaches members how to recruit at cocktail parties, formal events and even in the office. "We give them the tools to speak in all settings. They understand all the arguments," explains Carol Mulch Korhumel, who leads the sessions. "Then we set them loose."

And ever more so, ever further. The preachers of the Concord cult are all around us, and they never sleep. A few months ago, Jorge Robertos, a waiter in Greenwich Village, gave in to a Concord proselytizer and asked for more information. He now regrets his weak moment. "I signed up with my girlfriend and gave my phone number, and they called and called," he says. "They never stopped. They always want you to do something. At least at church if I give my donation they leave me alone." •

Getting the economy all wrong.

THE GREAT SAVINGS SCARE

By John B. Judis

What's the greatest single problem facing Americans? Ask some of our most prominent citizens, and you'll get the same answer: we don't save enough. The decline in the savings rate is the cause of our country's economic ills, they'll say. It retards economic growth, leaving us at the mercy of our more frugal competitors. By discouraging investment, it holds down productivity, which depresses wages and living standards. It contributes to inner-city poverty and middle-class angst. If it continues over the next decade, it will leave the country bankrupt as we enter a new century. Our children and grandchildren will have to devote their lives to making up for our profligacy.

What can be done? Consumers are advised to abandon their frivolous ways, their search for instant gratification, by putting more of their earnings into stocks, bonds and savings accounts. Voters and politicians can curb government debts by balancing the budget every year. And they can give Social Security and their own

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retirement a sound basis by running budget surpluses and by privatizing part or even all of Social Security—redirecting Social Security payments into individual retirement accounts (IRAs) that will fuel the stock market.

You can hear this argument from investment banker Peter G. Peterson and from other members of the Concord Coalition, from presidential candidate and billionaire Ross Perot, and from bankers and brokers who barely conceal their glee at the thought of billions of dollars being diverted from Social Security trust funds into the stock market. You hear it from politicians in Congress ranging from John Kasich, the chairman of the House Budget Committee, to Senator Robert Kerrey, the co-chair of the bipartisan committee on entitlements reform. And you get it from policy experts and their organizations, many of which, like the Cato Institute, are heavily subsidized by the bankers and brokers.

You wouldn't know it from the amount of publicity it gets, but this theory of savings is almost entirely without merit. It is based on the questionable use of statistics, outworn economics and moral confusion. If allowed to dominate our thinking—whether with regard to Social Security, balanced budgets or personal morality—it will have exactly the opposite effect it promises: it will depress our growth and investment, making it more difficult to maintain, let alone raise, our standard of living.

The weakness of this theory begins with its basic premise: namely, that personal savings rates have fallen. Peterson and the savings hawks cite Commerce Department figures showing that personal savings declined as a proportion of disposable income from 8.4 percent in 1984 to 4.8 percent in 1989 and has remained at that level ever since. Some econometricians don't buy these figures, however, because the Commerce Department omits public pension funds and capital gains, among other things, from its totals of savings and income. Sociological economist Fred Block, an early critic of the way the consumer price index is calculated, has questioned the Commerce figures in a recently published book, *The Vampire State and Other Myths and Fallacies about the U.S. Economy*. He estimates that savings have not fallen at all, but have remained at around 8 percent since 1984.

In a recent study, based on rival data from the Survey of Consumer Finance, Federal Reserve economists Arthur Kennickell and Martha Starr-McCluer estimate household savings at 12.2 percent between 1983 and 1989. And in a National Bureau of Economic Research working paper, MIT economist James Poterba and his colleagues point out that the discrepancy between available data on retirement savings and the Commerce figures "brings into question the most widely cited measure of national saving." These critics don't necessarily clinch the case, but they should make anyone hesitate before bemoaning the decline in personal savings.

Even if you accept that some decrease in the savings rate occurred after 1984, there is still reason to question the way that Peterson, Kasich and the others interpret it. They say that the slump in savings uniquely caused the decline in investment, productivity, wages and jobs. In mathematical terms, it's the independent variable. But when you look at the economic figures for the last fifteen years, it's clear that the savings rate began to drop in the same years that America's trade deficit began to climb. The trade deficit was $15 billion in 1981. It soared to $114.2 billion in 1985 and $142.1 billion in 1987. Today it hovers around $100 billion.

A rise in the trade deficit (a rise in domestic consumption, but not in domestic income) shows up as a decline in the savings rate, which is the proportion of income not consumed. If you recalculate the savings rate, canceling out the effect of the trade deficit, you find that it has remained fairly stable over the last forty years. In 1961 and 1995, for instance, the savings rate was 6.5 percent. Certainly, the high budget deficits of the mid-'80s fueled the trade deficit. But just as important, if not more so, were declining American competitiveness, the overvaluation of the dollar, and Japan's and other Asian nations' trade barriers, which have contributed to a rising trade deficit even as the budget deficit has shrunk. If the savings hawks are worried about declining investment and growth, they should be cursing the trade deficit as much as the decline in savings.

Peterson and the savings hawks also assume that the amount of savings determines the amount of investment, rather than vice versa. But the question of which determines which is a contested one. Current policy debate pivots on it, and so does the difference between classical and Keynesian economics. Peterson assumes that an increase in savings translates into lower interest rates and an automatic increase in investment. "Savings and investment are different sides of the same equation," Peterson writes in his new book, *Will America Grow Up Before It Grows Old?* "In a market economy like ours, interest rates go up or down to ensure that the demand for one matches the supply of the other."

But modern economies don't necessarily work that way. Investment decisions are not based simply on interest rates and the volume of savings, but also on the expected rate of return. In the 1930s, for instance, the U.S. enjoyed extremely low interest rates, but investment virtually halted. In the 1970s, inflation pushed long-term real interest rates below zero, but growth and investment lagged behind the previous two decades. In calculating this rate of return, businessmen consider demand for their products and the general state of the national and world economy. If businessmen's uncertainty about future profits outweighs the lure of lower interest rates, then the savings that were initially created will disappear.

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Take an economy in which workers save an extra 10 percent of their income and put the money into savings accounts that create potential funds for lending. That results in lower interest rates, but also in lower demand for consumer goods and, by extension, capital goods—the goods like steel and machine tools that are used to produce other goods. If businessmen, worried about future demand, don't invest in spite of lower rates, then they will eventually have to lay off workers because of reduced demand. As workers are laid off, total income will decline, so that even if workers continue to save the extra 10 percent, their total amount of savings will decline until it is equal to the amount of investment that business is now willing to undertake. Lower investment will cause lower savings, rather than vice versa.

Since the early 1970s, several factors have dampened businessmen's incentive to invest in the domestic economy. The recovery and reconstruction of Western European and Japanese economies, and the rise of newly industrialized economies in Asia and Latin America, have created global overcapacity in automobiles, textiles, steel, ships, petrochemicals, semiconductors and other key industries. In the auto industry, for instance, the world's producers can now make about 25 percent more cars than they have customers for. This overcapacity has been swelled by the mercantile trade policies followed by Japan and other Asian countries, which have increased global supply without proportionately increasing demand.

In addition, the U.S. and the rest of the world have suffered since 1971 from global financial instability. Since the U.S. abandoned the Bretton Woods gold standard in 1971, the exchange rates among currencies have fluctuated wildly, subject not only to central banks but to massive private speculation. What Paul Volcker calls "the loss of exchange rate discipline" has discouraged long-term investment and encouraged overly cautious national monetary and fiscal policies. (Interest rates have sometimes appeared to stay stubbornly high in spite of increases in savings.) Together with overcapacity, this instability has played a much more important role than the personal savings rate in keeping down investment and growth.

There are still circumstances in which raising the savings rate will kindle investment. In postwar Japan, for instance, the government knew that demand for exports could make up for a loss in consumer demand at home. By supervising industry closely and protecting the home market against imports, the Japanese government ensured that increasing savings would lead to new investment. But, in a relatively open economy like America's, and in the current world economy, increasing savings at the expense of consumption won't necessarily lead to investment and growth. It might even make things worse by reducing effective demand and spurring a decline in investment.

Consider, finally, the way that the savings hawks see the relationship between consumption (the other side of saving) and investment. Peterson's proposals on savings reflect the received wisdom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when economists argued strenuously that the only way to encourage investment was to reduce consumption. It made sense then, but not now.

To understand how the American economy has changed over the last century, you have to understand how the relationship between the two sectors of the economy—capital goods and consumer goods—has changed. (I draw here on the work of economic historians Martin J. Sklar and James Livingston and, particularly, on Livingston's extraordinary book, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940.*) From the Civil War through World War I, the U.S. had its industrial revolution, which was driven by the growth of steel, railway cars, machine tools and other capital goods industries. In the 1920s, however, the American economy began a fundamental shift. New technology, the use of electricity and the introduction of "scientific management" made possible gigantic advances in productivity. Output within the entire manufacturing sector would grow 64 percent over the decade, while the manufacturing labor force would actually shrink. The number of workers in capital goods industries would decline by over 12 percent.

In this new economy, the growth of the capital goods sector could no longer create new income and demand. If anything, the introduction of new technology led to a permanent crisis of overcapacity—the economy's ability to produce new goods outran its creation of income with which to buy them. This crisis explains the intractability of the Great Depression, the first business cycle downturn from which the U.S. economy did not recover automatically. The U.S. overcame the Great Depression and the threat posed by the new economy—but only by transforming the relationship between the government and the economy and between the capital and consumer goods sectors.

Beginning with the New Deal, the government became an integral part of the new economy. It provided the demand for consumer and capital goods that the private economy could no longer generate on its own. After World War II, government expenditures on defense, highways and social welfare became essential to the country's rapid economic growth. At the same time, the production of cars and other consumer goods, along with services such as health care and entertainment, drove the economy and, along with government work, provided the bulk of new jobs. The growth of consumer services, and of consumer demand, was promoted by a new ethic of consumption that stressed the importance of living well and by the introduction of credit cards and other new kinds of consumer credit. Along with the

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growth of government, the encouragement of consumption rather than saving was essential to economic prosperity.

Recently this economy has exhibited weaknesses—lagging growth and a preponderance of lower-paying McJobs, for instance—and there are ways to address them. These include seeking to remove trade barriers in countries with which the U.S. continually runs large deficits, negotiating a new international monetary accord that will create greater stability and pursuing a mix of public investments that will maintain American competitiveness and reduce inequality. But Peterson and the savings hawks are not interested in these kinds of measures. They are fixated on rescuing the economy by discouraging consumption and reducing the economic role of government.

Savings hawks want to discourage consumption by balancing the budget in seven years. (Peterson even favors budget *surpluses*.) And some want to amend the Constitution to require a balanced budget. A balanced budget and a budget in surplus extract income from Americans, reducing consumer demand. Balancing the budget reduces consumer and investment demand, but it also, they argue, frees up for investment private funds that would have been used to finance the deficit.

PETER PETERSON BY JOHN SPRINGS FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Balancing the budget does make sense when the economy is already at full employment and a deficit can lead to rampant inflation, as occurred in the late '60s. Reducing deficits also makes sense when a country finds itself running consistently higher deficits (measured as a proportion of GDP) than its trading partners—stimulating imports, but not exports—and when the deficits become so large that they threaten to perpetuate themselves. That scenario occurred in the mid-'80s.

But neither of these circumstances prevails today. The U.S. is not yet at full employment. (It's at 81 percent of capacity, and unemployment nudged up last month.) And the Bush administration's 1990 budget deal and the Clinton administration's 1994 budget have brought the deficit under control. In 1996, the deficit was $107 billion, only 1.4 percent of GDP. That is the lowest share since 1974 and a lower proportion than any other advanced industrial country's. It's important to prevent a recurrence of the spiraling deficits of the '80s, but there is no reason to balance the budget now—and even less reason to commit ourselves to balancing it annually. Such a fiscal strategy would needlessly depress consumer and investment demand, while pushing the government to cut back on vital public investments.

Peterson and the savings hawks also warn that without drastic reform the Social Security program will go bankrupt. Peterson wants the federal budget to run a surplus during the first two decades of the twenty-first century "to lay up stores during the Boomers' peak earning years for the sudden burden that will accompany their retirement." He and the policy wonks from Cato blame Social Security for the decline in savings. Writes Michael Tanner of the Cato Institute, "Clearly, the Social Security tax reduces private savings. Workers are required by law to pay Social Security taxes. That precludes their investing those lost wages in private savings or investments." To increase savings, they want to privatize Social Security.

Unfortunately, the savings hawks fail to distinguish between the ordinary and technical meaning of savings. Individuals can set aside money for the future, but countries can't. National savings are either invested or disappear into the accounting ether as national income is diminished. There is no national piggy bank in which the federal government can store dollars for a rainy day by running budget surpluses. The best way for a nation to meet its obligations to its retirees is to use the money extracted from them earlier to improve the country's productive power—through the education of its workforce, the improvement of physical infrastructure and the encouragement of needed investments in research and development—so that, when they retire, the economy generates sufficient revenue to provide them with generous pensions.

In making their dubious proposals, the savings hawks rely on statistical legerdemain. In fact, the Social Security fund, as currently constituted, won't go into deficit until 2030. The fund's solvency could be pre-

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served until 2070 (if the planet remains in orbit that long) by increasing payroll taxes 1.1 percent for employees and employers, or by considerably less if the $70,000 limit on income that is subject to Social Security taxes were removed. Besides, privatization won't necessarily make the program more solvent. If workers are forced to put their money into stocks and bonds rather than into government accounts, the government will have to find other buyers for the Treasury bills that the Social Security trust fund now purchases. That could force it to raise interest rates on Treasury bills, which would threaten the value of the stocks that future retirees were forced to purchase. The only clear winners would be the brokers, who would reap billions in initial commissions, and current stockholders, who would experience an initial jump in the value of their holdings.

Even if their economics are bunk, though, isn't there something to the moral argument made by the savings hawks? Peterson blames the decline of personal savings rates on the pursuit of "instant gratification" and the desire to "have it all—and have it now." Proclaims Senator Kerrey, "Savings is hard precisely because the act forces us to make choices between things we would like to have and things we know we need to have in the future. There is a powerful moral dimension to savings because it forces us to defer gratification and invest in the future. Not only is this good economics, but it is also a good example for our children."

Well, it is bad economics and it is morally meanspirited. Except for the money captured by the tax system, most of the savings available for investment come from the very rich. It's fine to tell them to invest in new businesses rather than Old Masters. Advising ordinary Americans to consume less is another matter. After all, it is only in this century, buoyed by advances in productivity, that mankind has reached the point where many people—not just a privileged few—can devote themselves to activities that have nothing to do with their brute survival, from the appreciation of art and entertainment to the cultivation of physical and psychic well-being. Unlike their proletarian or peasant ancestors, who toiled from childhood to death, many of today's Americans can spend two decades growing up and can retire from work without facing rude poverty. Why, in the name of an abstractly uplifting asceticism, should we renounce these fruits of progress?

There are, of course, perfectly legitimate questions about what Americans should do with their expanded and democratized realm of consumption. Should public education be lifelong? Should national parks be run as private businesses? Should V-chips be installed in television sets? Should car use be discouraged in favor of public transportation? Should neighborhood eating cooperatives be encouraged as an alternative to fast-food restaurants? Should access to the Internet be free? But there is no good economic reason, and no good moral reason, to constrict the realm of freedom and consumption itself. It's a particularly ridiculous argument for an extraordinarily wealthy man like Peterson to make: dubbed the "Cadillac Cassandra" by *Barron's*, he has been known to take a helicopter from Manhattan to the Hamptons so that he can avoid the inconvenience of public highways.

Why do seemingly intelligent people such as Peterson and Kerrey espouse such wrongheaded ideas? One can blame it on venal self-interest. Many of the people making the loudest case for privatizing Social Security or balancing the budget have some connection to brokerage houses and banks. Cato's Social Security project, for instance, is financed by American Express, AIG Life and Alex. Brown & Co. and is co-chaired by a mutual fund manager from State Street Global Advisors. And many of the politicians, including Nebraska's Kerrey, number the financial industry among their constituents and major contributors. But it would be unfair to assume that Peterson, Kerrey or Tanner take the positions they do because they stand to profit from them. The problem is more that the enormous funds that subsidize the savings hawks allow their voices to be heard over those of their worthy opponents.

The fundamental cause of the savings hawks' blindness lies elsewhere. Peterson, Perot, Kerrey and their colleagues are held captive by an obsolete theory about consumption, savings and investment that held sway in the early 1900s. These ideas were discredited after 1929, but they came back in full force in the '70s, when America suffered from an unprecedented stagflation and when reaction mounted to the counterculture of the '60s. Monetarists and other neo-classicists attacked the Keynesians for their failure to anticipate that unemployment and inflation could rise simultaneously. The Puritan counter-revolution tarred the '60s with the brush of self-indulgence even though, in many ways, the social movements of the '60s offered a critical reflection on the values of postwar consumerism. Peterson, the youthful CEO of Bell and Howell who entered government in the Nixon administration, was part of that reaction, as are many of the people who argue for a return to classical economics and an ethic of Protestant self-denial.

Much of our political debate now turns on the conflict created by this reaction to Keynesian economics and the counterculture. It looks on the surface like a battle between an older liberalism and a new, enlightened conservatism, but it's not. It is really a contest between a set of half-century-old ideas that need to be refashioned for the next century and another set of century-old nostrums that were deservedly repudiated during the Great Depression. Peterson, Perot, Kasich and the savings hawks don't want to take us forward, but backwards. It's not America that needs to grow up. It's the savings hawks like Peterson who have regressed intellectually and need to be reminded that they're doing Americans a disservice by lecturing them on the evils of consumption. •

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THE HARD QUESTIONS

Blacks only?

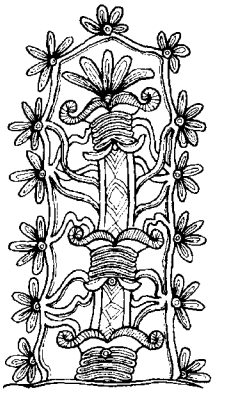
Fewer people voted for Proposition 209, the amendment to the California Constitution that bans affirmative action, than said they would in pre-election polls. I suspect that, when faced with the voting machine, many voters experienced a twinge of terminal horror: they hesitated to take the fateful action that would sweep away procedures, offices and agencies we had lived with for twenty-five years. Many of us who had thought or written in opposition to affirmative action experienced a similar reaction when it finally seemed something decisive would be done. Complexities that had not been obvious in the debate or in popular thinking suddenly emerged, like a genie from the bottle.

The last few months have seen an upsurge of new thinking on affirmative action, mostly by its opponents. Thoughtful articles, all stopping short of advocating the policy's total abandonment, have appeared in THE NEW REPUBLIC (by James Q. Wilson and by Glenn Loury), *The New Yorker* (by Alan Wolfe), and even *The Weekly Standard* (David Frum) and *National Review* (Dinesh D'Souza). All showed surprising flexibility. Among the defenders of affirmative action, there has been comparatively little new thinking. Their approach seems to be to stand pat and hope that they can count on enough liberal judges to maintain the status quo.

What gives pause to opponents now? It is the clear knowledge that the end of affirmative action, honestly implemented, means a radical reduction in the number of blacks attending selective colleges, universities and professional schools. The consequences for other "protected" minorities and women would be less drastic. Hiring and promotion policies wouldn't change much, either: the Texaco case demonstrates that business can be kept well in line when it comes to jobs. And preferences for government contractors are already difficult to maintain in the face of clear Supreme Court decisions.

Higher education, though, is a different story. There, the end of affirmative action means facing the prospect that the number of African American students accepted into selective institutions would drop from 6 or 7 percent to around 2 percent. In other words, the predominant pathway to well-paying and influential jobs for blacks would all but disappear. This would be a disaster for race relations and for the prospect of a fuller integration of African Americans into the mainstream of American society.

The simple question then becomes: Are we willing, in the name of the principle of color-blindness, to accept this result, and to deal with its damaging consequences for race relations and for the ultimate goal of a decent multiracial society? Some try to duck this question by advocating that we end affirmative action but improve primary and secondary education for blacks so they can qualify for selective institutions. This sounds reasonable, but it is unfortunately no answer: we have been trying to improve education for decades, with some limited success. But we are nowhere near getting substantial representation of blacks in selective American institutions of higher education on the basis of color-blind admissions.



So what is to be done? Richard Kahlenberg's proposal to substitute economic hardship criteria for racial criteria won't maintain blacks at their current percentages, unless it is implemented transparently for that purpose. James Q. Wilson argues that for undergraduate institutions the objective of racial diversity is legitimate, and preferences for this purpose are as defensible as those for athletes or alumni children. He contends that racial diversity is not, however, a legitimate objective for law and medical schools. But why not? One could find more compelling reasons to preserve racial preferences for professional schools. Black doctors disproportionately serve black patients, black lawyers disproportionately serve black clients. The argument can go back and forth: Don't blacks deserve the best doctors and the best lawyers? To which the answer is, don't blacks also have the right to gain access to doctors and lawyers who they think will be more understanding and empathetic?

We are all—even the defenders of affirmative action—opposed to quotas. We are all for a fuller incorporation of the black minority into American life. (Asians, apparently, can fend for themselves, and so, for the most part, can Latinos.) Can we restrict affirmative action only to African Americans? I suggested this in 1987, and this is what Frum and D'Souza propose. It seems politically impossible, even if we could argue that there is constitutional legitimacy for such a limitation. Can we find a way to reconcile some degree of selectivity or preference, limited to the one group that clearly has the most claim to it, with the language and ideals of the Fourteenth Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and with the parallel language of California's Proposition 209, which is modeled on these precedents?

An approach that broke down the affirmative action package, by group and by kind of preference, could win solid majority support. But there is much work to be done. Up to now, only the opponents of affirmative action have been willing to outline the contours of a compromise. The defenders insist on holding on to the whole bag.

The intention of the Civil Rights Act was to prohibit discrimination against blacks. If we take its language and intention seriously and literally, it also prohibits discrimination in favor of blacks. Universities and professional schools want to maintain this kind of preference, for good reasons and bad, as we see from the fierce resistance in these institutions to Proposition 209. Can we grant preference to the group that initiated the civil rights revolution, while maintaining the color-blindness incorporated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Proposition 209? Or do the two objectives fatally contradict each other?

It seemed a reasonable thing to ban all discrimination on the grounds of race in 1964: we thought then that legal discrimination was the only problem. Now, after a quarter-century of experience, we have discovered that it goes deeper. Clear and seemingly intractable inequalities persist in the measured abilities and aptitudes of different groups. As a result, the way we justify our commitment to incorporating blacks into our institutions of higher education, our government, our businesses, becomes an exercise in hypocrisy. Can we find a way to free our thousands of decision-makers to make the choices on admission and employment and promotion that seem right and proper to them? Some of us think that allowing this would not, overall, harm the hope of a fuller integration. But we are now stuck between the absolutes of color-blindness and of quotas. Can we find the legal language, the political coalitions, to institute the more limited affirmative action that our society needs?

NATHAN GLAZER

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

At Elsinore

Kenneth Branagh wins two victories in **Hamlet** (Castle Rock). He has made a vital, exciting film; and he has triumphed over the obstacles he put in his own way.

Let's first rejoice in the virtues. Branagh confirms what was known from the opening shot of *Henry V*: he has fine cinematic skills. His directing keeps *Hamlet* flowing, endows scenes that might become static with germane movement. Many of his touches illuminate. One of them: Hamlet comes into a huge mirrored room in the palace, sees himself full-length and, after a moment, begins "To be or not to be." Two selves speak that speech and give it an added edge.

Then there's the text itself. Branagh has used the complete First Folio text, has included a scene from the Second Quarto that is not in the Folio, to make a film that runs four hours plus intermission. I could find only a few alterations, trifles compared with the chopped, twisted, insulting text that Olivier used in his 155-minute version. Branagh's film looks splendid. He sets it in the mid-nineteenth century—with Blenheim Palace serving as the exterior of Elsinore—and Alex Byrne's costumes fully exploit the period. The cinematographer, Alex Thomson, using 70-mm wide-screen format, has nonetheless created lighting that seems naturally evolved from the hundreds of candles. And as for the music, Patrick Doyle again does wonders. He wrote the scores for Branagh's two previous Shakespeare films, and here again he provides music that rises unobtrusively to benefit scene after scene.

Every supporting role of significance has been superbly cast and is superbly played. I can't imagine a better Claudius than Derek Jacobi, who brings to it force and cunning and manipulative charm. The sequences in which he converts the furious Laertes from enemy to accomplice are masterpieces of guile manifested as honesty. (Jacobi, by the way, was the first Hamlet that Branagh ever saw; and years later Jacobi directed Branagh in a theater production.)

Jacobi is no surprise: Julie Christie is. This Golden Girl of the 1960s virtually disappeared for a while, then reappeared in a London production of Pinter's *Old Times*. She was so dull that I thought she was being used just for her name. But here, as Gertrude, she is emotionally rich. She brings to the role the apt quality of overblown sex object, and, presumably with Branagh's help, she completely fulfills the woman. In Gertrude's key moment, the closet scene, Christie bursts with the frightened despair of a guilty woman who thinks that her behavior may have driven her son mad.

Kate Winslet, dear to us already through *Sense and Sensibility* and *Jude*, gives Ophelia the kind of vulnerability that almost invites the man she loves to wound her. Polonius gets the obtuse officiousness that he needs from Richard Briers. It's immediately clear why Horatio, done by Nicholas Farrell, is Hamlet's dearest friend: anybody would want him for a friend. Laertes, a role always in danger of being as much of a blowhard as his father, Polonius, is realized in his confusions by Michael Maloney. Branagh, as he did in *Much Ado About Nothing*, has sprinkled some American actors through his cast. The best of these is Charlton Heston as the Player King, sounding and (even) looking plummy, home at last.

Hamlet is unique in Shakespeare. I can think of no other role in the plays in which an actor is so compelled, commanded, to present *himself*. Macbeth, Othello, Iago, the Richards and the Henrys—run through the roster, and always the actor selects and nurtures what there is in his imagination and experience and technique that will make the man come alive. No such selections for Hamlet. The whole actor is the whole character. So, when we see a Hamlet, we are looking at an actor in a unique way.

Branagh's Hamlet—or, one might say, Hamlet's Branagh—is attractive, keen, nobly intended, tender with regret for Ophelia, torn with disgust for the chicaneries of the world, fiery, quite susceptible to cracking into frenzy. (In appearance, he is fair—not Olivier's platinum blond—with a somewhat darker moustache and goatee.)

This is a man we could meet and understand. What this Hamlet lacks is what possibly we could not understand: his sense of falling upward into the metaphysical. This is what is sometimes called the "poetic" nature of Hamlet, this linkage with a spirit walking the earth in quest of purgation; and this linkage, in mystery and awe and uncertainty, leads

FILMS WORTH SEEING

The Crucible. *Refreshed by liberation from specific modern reference, Arthur Miller's play is more affecting than ever. As the farmer ensnared in the seventeenth-century Salem witchcraft trials, Daniel Day-Lewis struggles manfully. (Reviewed 12/16/96)* **One Fine Day.** *A 1930s "screwball" comedy in 1990s dress, and faring well. Michelle Pfeiffer and George Clooney as the couple who, of course, fight when they meet and, amusingly, get to know each other better. (1/20/97)* **The Portrait of a Lady.** *Henry James at the service of the feminist Jane Campion. Yet this account of a young American woman encountering Europe a century ago has rewards even in this version. (12/23/96)* **Some Mother's Son.** *Helen Mirren and Fionnula Flanagan as the mothers of two IRA sons in the hunger strike of 1981. Inevitably partisan but inevitably moving. (12/30/96)* **—SK**

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to what Granville Barker called "a tragedy of inaction." Branagh's Hamlet doesn't attain this quality: it doesn't quite seem to be in him. Not long ago Ralph Fiennes, burdened with an unworthy director and cast, nevertheless did a Hamlet on Broadway that took us out into the spheres. Not Branagh. Every word he speaks is true. But in Hamlet that is not quite enough.

Now the lesser aspects of the film. First, the obverse side of Branagh's directing skill. He is too eager for spectacle, even if it's pointless or harmful. When Gertrude and Claudius exit at the end of the first court scene, confetti rains down on them. For the moment, it's startling, pretty. Then we wonder who planned it and who threw it. Answer: the director. When the Ghost speaks to Hamlet, the earth splits and flames leap. Is this God overseeing unpurged souls? Or the special effects department? Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive on a toy locomotive. Who put that model train and tracks on the palace grounds? Old King Hamlet? Claudius? Or the director? When Hamlet and Laertes duel, the civilized sport explodes into Errol Flynn antics, with ropes and chandeliers—another directorial intrusion. Branagh sets the whole film in winter, which allows for some breathtaking vistas but makes us wonder why the old king was sleeping outdoors in his snow-covered orchard on the afternoon of his murder and how the brookside flowers could be present when Ophelia drowns.

Another obverse side, one that may sound odd: the use of the complete text. Admirable though it is in Branagh to aim at "classic" status, not every word is helpful today, especially in a film. To hear Marcellus discourse on "the bird of dawning" at Christmastime, just after the Ghost's second appearance, is a soft indulgence in Elizabethan folklore. To hear Gertrude include a small dirty joke, about "long purples," when she tells Laertes of his sister's death is to coddle the lad from Stratford who couldn't always keep rustic humor out of his plays. And the sad fact is that, when Shakespeare takes time out from drama for moral commentary, the result is sometimes mere homiletics. Hamlet's speech about "the dram of evil" is not only a brusque lapse in the action, it captures perfectly the quality in Shakespeare that Bernard Shaw called "the atmosphere of the rented pew."

Sex. Branagh has searched for chances to get it into the film. While Polonius is warning Ophelia to be careful in her behavior with Hamlet, to avoid the prince completely, Branagh includes flashback shots of her and Hamlet naked in bed together. Presumably Branagh takes his license from the bawdy song that Ophelia later sings when she is mad—"Young men will do't if they come to't," etc.—a song that is usually viewed as the raving of a sexually repressed virgin. Whether or not Hamlet and Ophelia actually had an affair is possibly arguable, but what seems clear is that, if they have made love, it detracts considerably from the fierce, Savonarola-like outburst of the "get thee to a nunnery" passages.

Then, too, Polonius is given a visiting whore in the scene with Reynaldo, who is apparently her pimp. (Ophelia bursts in without knocking—fortuitously, just after Reynaldo and the whore leave.) Branagh's purpose is to lend irony to the old man's instructions to Reynaldo, about checking on Laertes's behavior in Paris, but the episode smacks of opportunism.

Politics. Of course *Hamlet* is, among other elements, a political play. One cause for Hamlet's hatred of Claudius is that his uncle has "popp'd in between th'election and my hopes." Branagh's use of the mid-century period affords the ambiance of the "Age of Metternich," but it misplaces in time the Denmark-England-Norway-Poland relationships of the original. Further, Branagh distorts the political action of the closing scenes. Early in the play we learn that the young Fortinbras of Norway wants to reconquer some lands that his country lost to Denmark, but the Norwegian king dissuades him. Fortinbras swears never to attack Denmark, but he will ask for the right of passage through Denmark to attack Poland. Toward the end of the play Fortinbras leads an army into Denmark and sends a messenger to Claudius to ask for that right of passage.

Incomprehensibly, in Branagh's film, Fortinbras then attacks Elsinore. (Real reason: Branagh wants to heat up the film's closing moments.) Shots of this violence are intercut with the Hamlet-Laertes duel. Just as Hamlet dies, the Norwegian soldiers burst into the court, destroying as they come. Fortinbras ought to feel a bit foolish, not only having broken his word but to find out that, just before Hamlet expired, the prince named him as his successor. ("He has my dying voice.") Instead, Fortinbras is shown as a glowering conqueror moderately disturbed by the prince's death. The very last shot is of old King Hamlet's statue being toppled and smashed. Why did Branagh choose that shot as the moment toward which the entire film moved?

Some other points might be called matters of interpretation—Claudius's slapping of Hamlet in anger at the chaffing about Polonius's corpse, the straitjacketing of Ophelia in a padded cell—but one Branagh touch seems just plain misreading. Claudius (in Act III, Scene 1) says he has "closely sent for Hamlet" so that the prince can meet Ophelia while Claudius and Polonius are hidden and watching. They do hide. Hamlet enters, finds the chamber empty though he has been sent for, muses aloud while waiting ("To be or not to be"). Then Ophelia enters—the girl who, for days, has been forbidden to see him. And it was the king who summoned him here. Surely, in simple reason, Hamlet must be suspicious that this is a set-up from the moment she appears. Instead, Branagh plays it merely petulantly until, after the nunnery speech, he hears a noise behind the door and the deception dawns on him. Branagh's treatment not only makes Hamlet less acute than we are, it takes the bite out of "Are you honest?"

Interpretations and innovations have different weights in a Shakespeare film from such matters in a theater production. When I saw Ingmar Bergman's production of *Hamlet*, with his sluttish Ophelia wandering through scenes in which Shakespeare forgot to include her, I was relieved that Bergman had not filmed it. Branagh's film, warts and all, will be with us for some time to come.

On the whole, this is good news. Though his *Henry V* and *Much Ado About Nothing* were closer to perfection, *Hamlet* is more difficult in every way. Flaws,

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problems, bumps, yes; but the film surpasses them finally through Branagh's talent and the talents of his colleagues. And, not to be slighted, there is Branagh's infectious joy—the right word even for *Hamlet*—in doing Shakespeare.

Note: Branagh's screenplay is just published (Norton; paperbound $17, limited hardcover edition $100, 224 pages). Many photographs in color, plus a diary kept during the making of the film by the text consultant, Russell Jackson. •

Benjamin Franklin, the Jews, and cyber-bigotry.

Prophet and Loss

By Claude-Anne Lopez

"O Americans, don't let the Jews enter America.... You have to get rid of the Jews.... If the Jews remain in America a hundred years, they will be dominating the economy.... They spoil public life, they spoil your morals...." These are the immortal words of one Rajib Najib, who believed that he was quoting the immortal words of Benjamin Franklin in an address to the Constitutional Convention. When and where did he say it? In 1990, at the annual convention of the Muslim Arab Youth Association in Kansas City. And where can one find Rajib Najib's text? On the Internet, naturally. The Internet is becoming the newest purveyor of prejudice in America. Its misuse has opened a free and universal platform for ignorance and hatred. What follows is a case in point.

The Arab Youth Association is not alone in disseminating what has become known as "Franklin's Prophecy." The allegedly anti-Semitic pronouncements of Benjamin Franklin are also available on the web site of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. "White people have a right to be proud of their race," the page declares, and then proceeds to the perpetration of an old hoax. Indeed, such is the moral and historical authority of Franklin's name that more than two centuries after his death the editors of his papers at Yale University, as well as the American Philosophical Society and the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, are more and more frequently questioned about the authenticity of his "Prophecy." As a cautionary lesson for a wired culture, then, it is worth setting the record straight once again.

On February 3, 1934, there appeared in *Liberation*, a weekly journal published in Asheville, North Carolina, the text of a speech that Franklin is alleged to have delivered at the "Constitutional Convention of 1789." (Of course, it was in 1787, not in 1789, that the Constitutional Convention was held.) This speech was discovered, we are told, in a hitherto unknown diary titled "Chit-Chat around the Table during Intermissions," a diary purportedly kept by Charles Coatesworth Pinckney, South Carolina's delegate to the Convention. But the authorship of the speech is certainly modern. It was most likely the brainchild of William Dudley Pelley, the head of an American Nazi group.

Pelley was born in Lynn, Massachusetts, in 1890, the son of a Protestant minister. He worked for a stretch in Hollywood as a scriptwriter until sometime in the 1920s, when he "experienced death" for a period of seven minutes. During those seven minutes, he said, he made contact with an oracle. And shortly after Hitler's rise to power in 1933, Pelley's oracle instructed him to organize The Silver Shirts Legion, a secret group whose membership was recruited mostly in the South, the Pacific Northwest and California. The Silver Shirts Legion numbered, at its peak, somewhere between 15,000 and 50,000 adherents. Known as "the Chief"—he thought of himself as the American Hitler—Pelley was a prolific writer and an ardent propagandist. His mouthpiece was *Liberation*, which sold at least a million copies in its heyday.

"Franklin's Prophecy" has appeared in somewhat different versions over the years. (One of them insists that the Jews are Asiatics.) Here is the most frequently reproduced version:

> There is a great danger for the United States of America. This great danger is the Jew. Gentlemen, in every land the Jews have settled, they have depressed the moral level and lowered the degree of commercial honesty. They have remained apart and un-assimilated; oppressed, they attempt to strangle the nation financially, as in the case of Portugal and Spain.
>
> For more than seventeen hundred years they have lamented their sorrowful fate—namely, that they have been driven out of their home land; but, gentlemen, if the civilized world today should give them back Palestine and their property, they would immediately find pressing reason for not returning there. Why? ... Because they are vampires and vampires cannot live on *other vampires*—*they cannot live among* themselves. They must live among Christians and others who do not belong to their race.
>
> If they are not expelled from the United States by the Constitution within less than one hundred years, they will stream into this country in such numbers that they will rule and destroy us and change our form of Government for which we Americans shed our blood and sacrificed our life, property and personal freedom. If the Jews are not excluded within two hundred years, our children will be working in the fields to feed Jews while they remain in counting houses, gleefully rubbing their hands.
>
> I warn you, gentlemen, if you do not exclude the Jews forever, your children and your children's children will curse you in their graves. Their ideas are not those of Americans, even when they lived among us for ten generations. The leopard cannot change his spots. The Jews are a danger to this land and if they are allowed to enter, they will imperil our institutions. They should be excluded by the Constitution.

At the end of the text, Pelley noted that "the original of this copy is in the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia, PA." This has been categorically denied by the Institute. In plain English, the text is a fake.

Had this forgery been immediately denounced, it might have been stopped in its tracks. But the historical establishment did not read *Liberation*. (Who can blame it entirely?) And since the forgery's appearance provoked no American reaction, it was free to jump the Atlantic.

By August 1934, "Franklin's Prophecy" was reproduced in *Der Weltdienst*, a bulletin of international information published in German, French and English in Erfurt, Germany. Within a few days it was picked up by *Der Volksbund*, the organ of the Swiss Nazi movement, and in September it acquired the resonance that only Julius Streicher could give it in *Der Stürmer*. In a special edition devoted exclusively to Jews, Streicher included Franklin prominently in a list of anti-Semitic quotations from famous people ranging from Tacitus, Erasmus, Luther and Goethe to Voltaire and Gibbon, among others. The quotations from

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many of the other thinkers were not, alas, counterfeit. But the passage from "Franklin's Prophecy" had the dubious honor of being the only one underlined.

Back in the United States, on September 25, 1934, Robert Edward Edmondson used his financial newsletter to distribute the "Prophecy" to a large number of investment banks, businessmen and other subscribers. This brought it to the attention of Charles Beard. He decided to look into this startling text with the care that a professional historian and a political scientist of great repute could bring to such matters. But Beard's investigation would take half a year, in the course of which the fabrication spread further. The "Prophecy" 's consecration, as it were, was its appearance in the thirty-eighth edition of that bible of Nazism, Theodor Fritsch's *Handbuch der Judenfrage*. Simultaneously, the Right Cause Publishing Company, operating in Chicago, brought out a ten-cent pamphlet by one Victor de Kayville, in which Franklin is mentioned in a long list of people who warned the country against the Jews.

The 1930s were a fertile time for anti-Semitism in the United States. But it had not always been so in America. In the early days of colonial America, anti-Semitism was less rabid than in Europe for several reasons: the perception of Catholicism as the main rival of the dominant Protestant faith; the influence of the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and individual rights; the need for settlers; agricultural abundance. Considered the descendants of those Hebrews of the Old Testament, the Jews were revered by the Puritans. (It was believed that when they finally saw the light and embraced Jesus, the Millennium would begin.) As Frederic Copple Jaher points out in *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness*, "By the end of the seventeenth century, the approximately 250 Jews in America enjoyed de facto and, for the most part, de jure economic equality and religious liberty." They were disqualified only from practicing law and holding public office.

The eighteenth century saw an even greater acceptance of Jews in America. Parallels were often drawn by the clergy between the revolutionary happenings in America and the events of the Old Testament. When the Continental Congress was considering designs for the new nation's seal in 1776, "Franklin proposed that the seal represent Moses dividing the Red Sea ... and Jefferson suggested that it portray the children of Israel in the wilderness...." Hebrew was taught at Harvard and Yale. Franklin's academy (later to become the University of Pennsylvania) began admitting Jews in 1757. High society started opening its doors to wealthy Jews, as did the Revolutionary Army (up to the rank of colonel) and several Masonic lodges. Some anti-Semitic episodes—vandalizations of cemeteries, attacks in the press or from the pulpit—did occur in the young country; but on the whole a climate of tolerance prevailed for about a century after the Revolution.

The turning point came around 1880. The number of Jews, mostly from Germany, had grown from 15,000 to 300,000 in the space of forty years. Hotels were turning away Jews, as were country clubs, the higher degrees of Masonic lodges and some educational institutions. The situation grew worse in the early years of the twentieth century, with its influx of millions of impoverished Eastern Jews clinging tenaciously to what were viewed as outlandish habits. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, after the seeds of racial hatred for its own sake had been sown, the Jews, especially the Jews of New York, were accused of helping the Bolsheviks. A systematic campaign against them was launched in May 1920 by Henry Ford in *The Dearborn Independent*, and several of his themes were subsequently used by Pelley.

More than 120 Fascist organizations sprang up during the 1930s and '40s. The Protestant fundamentalists who had spearheaded anti-Semitic literature were joined by the charismatic Catholic priest Father Charles Coughlin of Detroit, whose radio programs attracted millions of followers. But the new wave of evangelical anti-Semitism provoked a response. In 1906, the American Jewish Committee was founded, and six years later the Anti-Defamation League was established to combat the threat. And non-Jews, too, figured in the struggle, among them Clarence Darrow, Evangeline Booth and the presidents of certain prestigious universities.

By March, 1935, Charles Beard was ready to assert that "Franklin's Prophecy" was no more than "a bare-faced forgery." He had searched for Pinckney's diary in all the probable places: the National Archives, the Library of Congress, the Franklin Institute and numerous other historical repositories, without finding any trace of it. And he had written to Edmondson, demanding to know the source of the "Prophecy." Edmondson advised Beard that a copy of the text had emanated from Madison Grant, who

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lived in New York, and Beard wrote to Grant on October 20, 1934, asking him where the original document could be found.

Madison Grant, according to his obituary in *The New York Times* on May 31, 1937, was a wealthy man who devoted his life to zoology, environmental causes and the building of the Bronx River Parkway. He was equally enthusiastic about the cause of eugenics, the so-called improvement of the race by careful breeding, and served on the Eugenics International Committee. In 1915, he published a deeply bigoted book called *The Passing of the Great Race.* He also pushed for the passage of anti-immigration laws, notably the Johnson Restrictive Act of 1924. He was, in sum, a man more interested in saving endangered animals than distraught humans.

Grant's answer to Beard was circumspect. Some years ago, he said, he had received what "purported" to be a copy of Franklin's remarks before the Convention in Philadelphia, but he had "no information whatsoever as to the authenticity of the paper." Beard next ascertained from the Librarian of Congress that Pinckney had almost certainly not kept a diary of the Convention proceedings, and that nowhere is there a trace of evidence that Franklin ever made such a speech.

The forgery was not even a good one. A stylistic analysis shows that the language of the "Prophecy" is not that of the eighteenth century. It contains anachronisms such as the Jews' longing for their "homeland," not a term employed at the time, but a term made current, for those who cared, by the Balfour Declaration in 1917. More important, the content of this statement imputed to Franklin is utterly at odds with Franklin's well-known principles of tolerance, especially in religious concerns.

The archives of Congregation Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia contain a subscription paper dated April 30, 1788, according to which Franklin, along with forty-four other citizens of all faiths, made a contribution toward relieving the debt incurred by the congregation in building a synagogue. The appeal may well have been written by Franklin himself. He had been such a vigorous fund-raiser over the years that the first thought of the Hebrew Society in distress must have been to enlist his help. The preamble of this text declares that even though the Hebrews, commonly called Israelites, worship God in a different manner, "the enlightened citizens of Philadelphia" will surely want to assist them. Indeed, many prominent Philadelphia names appear on that list: Rittenhouse, Ingersoll, Rush, Muhlenberg, Biddle, Cowperthwait, Benezet and others. Franklin donated five pounds, and this was, with two others, the largest donation.

Poor Franklin. Nobody loved a good hoax more than he did. He published his first at 16, his last less than a month before he died. And his hoaxes generally had benevolent purposes. Who can forget Franklin's most charming literary creation, Polly Baker, the spunky lass who not only bore many children out of wedlock but spoke up in a Connecticut court in defense of all seduced girls? The outspoken middle-aged widow Silence Dogood—the persona that he adopted in adolescence—pleaded in favor of education for girls, tolerance, freedom of speech and other worthy causes in a series of essays that the young Franklin slipped before dawn under the door of his brother's printing shop. And at the end of his life he produced the speech supposedly delivered by Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim to the Divan of Algiers in defense of the traditional custom of enslaving the Christians captured by Barbary pirates. In a biting parody of pro-slavery rhetoric, Sidi Mehemet wonders how his country could possibly obtain the necessary produce without Christian slaves. "Must we not then be our own slaves?" he asks. "Isn't more compassion due to Muslims than to Christian dogs?"

He was joking. But other people were not, and the story of "Franklin's Prophecy" does not end here. There were two problems with Charles Beard's refutation. The first was his assertion that never in his life had Franklin expressed anti-Semitic views. In truth, Franklin did use anti-Semitic language twice. Both instances were in an expression of frustration with a man who, Jewish or not, had behaved in an obnoxious manner.

The offending gentleman was Jean de Neufville, an Amsterdam merchant and banker who, back in 1779, had promised to raise a loan in the Netherlands for the American cause, after a similar attempt by another banker had failed. Franklin had turned to this "self-interested vain promoter" because he was reluctant to be forever milking the French Treasury. Neufville's original demands had been extravagant. And the promised loan never materialized.

Two years later, John Adams, in Holland at the time, found himself unpleasantly embroiled with this same Neufville, and on November 26, 1781, Franklin saw fit to warn his colleague: "I believe him to be as much a Jew as any in Jerusalem...." A month later, commenting on the document that he had sent Adams to back up his charges, Franklin elaborated sarcastically: "By this time I fancy your Excellency is satisfied that I was wrong in supposing J. de Neufville as much a Jew as any in Jerusalem, since Jacob was not content with any percents, but took the whole of his Brother Esau's Birthright; and his posterity did the same by the Canaanites, and cut their throats in the bargain, which in my conscience I do not think Mr. J. de Neufville has the least inclination to do by us, while he can get anything by our being alive."

The second problem with Beard's splendid refutation was that it appeared in *The Jewish Frontier,* which made it unlikely that the historical correction would reach the general public. And there the matter rested for two years, until a speech by Fiorello La Guardia. On March 3, 1937, New York's colorful mayor addressed a luncheon of the Women's Division of the American Jewish Congress. He suggested in his speech that the "brown-shirted fanatic who is menacing the peace of the world" be displayed in a chamber of horrors at the upcoming New York World's Fair.

The German Embassy reacted with indignation, and the very next day Secretary of State Cordell Hull expressed regrets over "the use of language by any American citizen calculated to offend a friendly power." Questioned by the press, the feisty and impenitent La Guardia stood by his statement and added some. At this point everybody jumped into the fray: the mayor's allies and the mayor's enemies, German-American organizations and a number of concerned citizens whose views were reported in the columns of *The New York Times.* But nothing could equal the pitch of fury reached by the German press: threats of a boycott of the World's Fair unless La Guardia were removed from office, slurs on the mayor's partial Jewish ancestry, a picture showing his resemblance to a gorilla, the accusation of being an *Obergangster,* and so on.

And Franklin in all this? His "Prophecy" was trotted out once more, warmly praised and declared in Germany to represent the views of an elder American statesman on the brink of death. Under the headline "FRANKLIN WAS RIGHT," *Der Angriff,* pretending that it had just come into possession of the document thanks to a reader, published a complete translation of it on March 9, 1937. *Die Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* did the same thing on the same day, stating that "the Jews will devour America."

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The following weeks of that agitated month of March saw two different developments: Mussolini's press took up the cudgels in its turn and the American intelligentsia woke up to the seriousness of the situation. *Il Duce* had concluded his alliance with Hitler in 1936. By early 1937, he felt it was time to drag his basically tolerant countrymen into a closer alignment with their formidable partner to the north. The La Guardia fracas provided the perfect pretext for the opening of an anti-Semitic campaign.

On March 20, the chairman of the Banca d'Italia sent Mussolini a letter quoting the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* to the effect that the Jews would devour America. It was enough to set the ball rolling. Dino Alfieri, the Minister of Popular Culture, cabled the Italian Embassy in Washington in 1938 to obtain more background on the interesting Franklin testimonial. The embassy's response has not been found, but the *Corriere della Sera* in Milan ran an article titled "Benjamin Franklin's terrible anathema against the Jews." Rome's *Popolo d'Italia* went even further, with comments that the United States was indeed in a dreadful mess because the Jews had been allowed to take over. Italians, beware!

In a comic piece of escalation, the German propaganda machine elevated Franklin to the presidency of the United States. It was as president of the United States that Franklin was referred to by Rudolf Hess, Deputy Leader of the Reich, in addresses to the workmen of the freshly conquered Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, on November 30 and December 2, 1938. Truth, of course, was of no interest to the dictators. Mussolini had proclaimed that "the regime needs myths, not history" and Hitler had asserted that "a lie is believed because of the unconditional and insolent inflexibility with which it is propagated."

In the United States, however, the search for the truth about "Franklin's Prophecy" was finally resumed in earnest. American scholars began to speak up. On March 10, 1937, three years and five weeks after the birth of the canard, *The New York Times* gave full play to the imposture and published Beard's refutation of 1935. By November, 1938, seven prominent scholars, the cream of colonial historians, joined forces to publish, under the auspices of the International Benjamin Franklin Society, a fifteen-page pamphlet titled *Benjamin Franklin Vindicated, An Exposure of the Franklin "Prophecy" by American Scholars.* They reaffirmed the mythical nature of Pinckney's diary, exposed the grossness of the forgery and deplored the way a lie can spread and gain credence. It was perhaps a sign of the times that only one of the seven scholars, J. Henry Smythe Jr., saw fit to remark that "this libel of the Jewish race is unjust both to Jews and to the name and fame of Franklin." The other six, among them Charles Beard, Henry Butler Allen (the director of the Franklin Institute), Alfred Rigling (the librarian of the Franklin Institute) and Carl Van Doren concentrated only on defending Franklin.

For the New York gubernatorial campaign of 1938, the *Vindication* proved to be too little too late to discourage the use of anti-Semitism as a political weapon. A group of Republican supporters of Thomas Dewey, who was running against the incumbent (and Jewish) governor, Herbert Lehman, deposited quantities of copies of the "Prophecy" in trains, buses, on car windshields, in waiting rooms and lavatories, going as far as sending them through the mail. This tactic evoked numerous letters of protest, some of them published in the major newspapers, and the dirty trick backfired. It may even have been a factor in Dewey's loss of the election.

That same year saw the opening of what would be a bitter and protracted struggle between William Dudley Pelley and the North Carolina authorities. The Silver Shirts' financial enterprises were in violation of the state's security laws, and Pelley, who had received a suspended sentence in 1935, was charged with parole violation. More dangerously, his pro-Nazi propaganda caused him to be embroiled with the Martin Dies Committee on Un-American Activities. And so the printing equipment of *Liberation* was sold in 1940 and Pelley repaired to Indiana, where he published anti-war articles in *The Galilean.* Those articles were the motive for his arrest in 1942 under the Espionage Act of 1917, which was the first instance of the legislation's use in a major prosecution after Pearl Harbor. Found guilty on eleven counts by a jury composed of farmers and small tradesmen of southern Indiana, Pelley was sentenced to fifteen years in jail. He was released from the Federal Penitentiary at Terre Haute in 1950, after serving eight years. He died in 1965.

One might have thought that the "Prophecy" would die with him. But it is still alive, owing to the dark side of that new wilderness called cyberspace. A controversy sparked by one Salah Jafar, who quotes the entire "Prophecy," has been taking place on one of the Internet's bulletin boards, where several people are refuting his statements. Poor Richard used to say that truth stands on two legs whereas a lie stands only on one. These days the only legs a lie needs are virtual ones. •

The musical near-geniuses of Berlin.

The Distant Sound

BY ALEX ROSS

I.

There is a small cemetery in Berlin called the Dritter Städtischer Friedhof. To reach it, you walk through the calm, leafy neighborhood of Schöneberg, which used to house some of the city's more eminent Jewish families. Streets take their names from heroines of Wagner operas: Brünnhildestrasse, Sieglindestrasse, Sentastrasse, Evastrasse. These days, visitors come to the Third Municipal Cemetery mainly to see the resting place of Marlene Dietrich, who asked to be buried here in her will. Her minuscule, unadorned grave reads simply "Marlene," indistinguishable from a long row of anonymous persons. Sitting on a bench one afternoon last summer, I watched three or four fans wandering in search of it. Each pilgrim hesitated quizzically for a second in front of a monument just opposite the entrance gate. On the other side of long rows of World War II dead, surrounded by an unkempt hedge, a golden angel youth holds his arms aloft. Below the celestial figure a gaunt pedestal proclaims the name FERRUCCIO BUSONI.

This tomb is a memento of an unparalleled musical phenomenon: Berlin between the World Wars. Busoni, the occult pianist and composer who lived in Berlin on and off from 1894 until his death in 1923, was one of those who set in motion the musical revolution that

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fired the city during the Weimar Republic. Many others followed him here in the early twentieth century, but you cannot pay them respects in Berlin; they scattered to the ends of the earth, to New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Zurich and Vienna. Still, the list of those who lived or worked in Berlin in the 1920s remains the most lustrous roster of musical names that has been attached to a single place in modern memory. On any given night, you could have heard Klemperer, Walter, Kleiber, Szell or Zemlinsky conducting opera; Furtwängler conducting the Philharmonic; Schnabel, Feuermann or Piatigorsky giving recitals. Schoenberg and Hindemith taught at the conservatories; Ernst Krenek, Stefan Wolpe and Hanns Eisler formed the young vanguard. And Kurt Weill, Busoni's most illustrious student, gave interwar Berlin its ultimate expression of itself in *The Threepenny Opera.*

Berlin also had its dark side. The bright and the dark were indivisible, as Brecht suggested in the ironic closing lines of *The Threepenny Opera.* It was (and remains) a city of epic fads. Composers aired fantasies of musical possibility, utopias of new language and substance. Slogans sprouted every week: Neoclassicism, New Objectivity, *Gebrauchmusik,* Surrealist Music, "mechanical music" or just plain New Music. Conservatory teachers encouraged experimentation in place of craftsmanship. Publishers chased after young composers, wanting the instant, transient hit of the season. Operas came and went with ever more ridiculous pretexts: jazzmen, ocean liners, airplanes, outer space. Weill was the strangest case of all. He was a man of vast talent who lingered perpetually at the threshold of an ultimate revolutionary masterpiece but never crossed over. To use a line from Weill's and Brecht's *Mahagonny,* which Klemperer once applied to Strauss: *Etwas fehlt,* something's missing. The Berliners offered possibilities in place of realities, regimes of the might-have-been.

That the stormy idyll of Weimar came to an end in 1933 makes it easy to idealize or to demonize the epoch as a whole. Idealists see it as a paradise destroyed by the Nazis (who in this account always arrive on the scene like aliens in a flying saucer). Skeptics dismiss the hurly-burly of Weimar as a noisy, meaningless prelude to Nazism, twitchings of the corrupted crowd. But how much of this world do we actually know? So much of the music, certainly, has not been heard. Some of it was stamped out by the Nazi regime, some of it was inherently fragile and subject to decay. Even the famous Weill is sketchily documented: one significant portion of his output no longer exists, another lies unperformed in messy manuscripts. Composers and careers dropped from sight: Ervín Schulhoff, who died in a concentration camp in 1942, or Berthold Goldschmidt, who emigrated to England, stopped composing for many years and then suddenly returned to fashion just before his recent death at the age of 93. You need not lapse into anti-fascist sentimentality to comprehend this world as incomplete, to see the need for extra toil to bring it back to life.

Some of this work has been done by scholars. Jürgen Schebera's illustrated biography of Weill is the latest of several excellent studies of the composer; Lys Symonette and Kim Kowalke have written almost a second biography in their painstaking annotations to the Weill-Lotte Lenya letters; and David Drew's mammoth study waits in the wings. Peter Heyworth's great biography of Otto Klemperer, of which the second volume has finally been issued, gives an incomparable picture of the city's musical life. Christopher Hailey has produced a solid study of Franz Schreker, one of the era's more shadowy figures. More importantly, musicians and musical politicians have devoted themselves to the rediscovery of Weimar. The last few years have seen revivals of obscure Weill theater pieces, Busoni's *Doktor Faust,* operas by Zemlinsky, chamber music of Ervín Schulhoff. The same repertory has become a favorite obsession of the recording industry, in such series as London's "Degenerate Music," Marco Polo's survey of Schreker's operas and Capriccio's Weill edition.

Kurt Weill: An Illustrated Life
by Jürgen Schebera
translated by Caroline Murphy
(Yale University Press, 400 pp., $35)

Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya
edited and translated by
Lys Symonette and Kim Kowalke
(University of California Press, 615 pp., $39.95)

Franz Schreker: 1878-1934
by Christopher Hailey
(Cambridge University Press, 453 pp., $85)

To dive into this world is to feel elation and frustration in quick waves. There are no great masters, no Olympian styles, no sprawling Beethovenian worklists. Then again, German music, which had dwelled on Olympus for so long, was descending for the first time into the plebeian struggles of the democratic cultural marketplace. And although that culture existed for little more than an instant, its conditions seemed permanent to composers at the time and drew authentic responses. What the Nazis halted was resumed elsewhere a few years or decades later. The great question asked in Berlin—how can classical music function in a capitalist democracy?—has yet to be answered. The output of Berlin composers may look weak in comparison with what the great Viennese masters produced in the previous century, or with what Strauss and Mahler made in Berlin and Vienna around 1900, but it looks triumphant in comparison with anything that has happened subsequently in any one city at any one time.

II.

Admittedly, Ferruccio Busoni makes an odd point of departure. It might seem better to begin with Richard Strauss, who presided over Berlin opera from 1898 to 1920. Strauss, after all, was the original polystylist, the inventor of fashions that later took hold in Weimar: atonal murder music, Baroque and classical pastiche, ironized operetta, dissonated urban satire, the railway carriages and broken marriages of *Zeitoper,* or topical opera. But the story of Strauss is too richly tangled to be told in the context of Berlin, and in any case his sensibility sympathized more with the gold-dusk ambience of Munich and Vienna. No, Busoni was the godfather of the scene.

He was a longtime wanderer, a Tuscan of Corsican descent who lived variously in Trieste, Vienna, Leipzig, Helsinki, Moscow, New York and Zurich before settling in Berlin. He had tangled roots in prior centuries, inheriting the harmonic mysticism of Liszt as well as the classical repose of Mozart. At the same time, however, he preached the future. He was a matchless egoist, yet he became a legendary teacher and a prophet of talent. He was a perfect paradox, a perfect Berliner.

Busoni had his greatest philosophical impact in a little book called *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music,* which appeared in Berlin in 1907. He called for an overthrow of the traditional "tonal system," a subdivision of the octave into microtones, a search for new instruments (including electronic ones), a rejection of Romantic excess, an aesthetic of objectivity. While he demanded that music seek new sounds, he also wished to stay true to an ideal of musicianship which was embodied for him in the figure of Mozart. "Let us experiment with sensible irregularities," he announced at the end of the *New Aesthetic.* The danger that he sensed in the first radical scores of

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Schoenberg was that the principle of atonality would cover everything in its shadow. Of the young Krenek, he would write that "he takes the edge off [harmonies] by his avoidance of contrasts; by renouncing the consonances which would set the free harmonies in relief, as does a cushion for a polygonal stone."

To what extent did Busoni's own music fill out his subtle prophecies? Oddly, very little. He dabbled in atonality in some of his shorter piano pieces, but toward the end of his career he worked hardest at a fluid, luminous, multi-layered vocabulary which he linked to the phrase "Young Classicism." This was not quite neo-classicism; Busoni sagely avoided the all-consuming concept and its literal application. He defined his style as "the sifting and turning to account of all the gains of previous experiments and their inclusion in strong and beautiful forms." He was too hesitant and fitful a composer to leave a major legacy, but a few of his works—the extravagant, hugely enjoyable Piano Concerto, the intricately jokey commedia dell'arte of *Arlecchino*, imposing fragments of *Doktor Faust*—are evidence of a major musical mind.

Busoni embodied what Berlin would offer again and again: genius incompletely fulfilled. He himself knew as much, and fashioned his career as a collection of arcana. Busoni was also a great teacher, though of a peculiar kind. He was more a presence, an oracle emanating enthusiasm to the experimenters around him. Bartók, Schoenberg and particularly Varese received his encouragement at turning points of their careers. Busoni's actual classes—the ones that Weill attended from 1920 to 1923—were loose and unstructured affairs, more like aggrandized salons. They were made possible by a very unusual and enlightened benefactor: Leo Kestenberg, chief musical functionary in the Weimar Republic's Ministry of Culture. It was Kestenberg who brought the famous modernists to the *Musikhochschule*; Kestenberg who refurbished and greatly enlivened the music-education system in Germany, leaving a legacy still felt today; Kestenberg who made possible the most impressive and notorious center for experimental opera the world has ever seen, Klemperer's Kroll Opera. And how exactly did Kestenberg develop his extraordinary musical instincts? He had studied piano with Busoni before the war, and later served him as copyist and secretary. Through such intricate connections, Busoni masterminded the late-Weimar efflorescence that he did not live to see.

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"Sacrifices for Peace"

What else does the world expect Israel to do?

There is persistent pressure on Israel to bring "sacrifices for peace." It is understood that these "sacrifices" refer to greater "flexibility" in dealing with the Arabs, but mean primarily that Israel should allow its dismemberment, in order to bring peace to the region.

What are the facts?

A Bizarre Concept. The concept to bring "sacrifices for peace" is a new one that has never before found application in world history. It was created by Arab propaganda to induce Israel to agree to its dismemberment, to give strategic assets to those who are determined to destroy it.

Since its creation in 1948, Israel has been subjected to almost constant Arab terror, to unceasing Arab aggression, and to three major wars. In the Six-Day War, it recovered its heartland of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and the eastern part of Jerusalem; it captured the Golan Heights from Syria, which had been used for decades to shell and spread terror over much of northern Israel; and it conquered Gaza and the Sinai Desert that had been used by Egypt as staging ground and invasion route to Israel.

Many Sacrifices for Peace. In order to achieve peace with its neighbors, Israel brought sacrifices for peace that have no precedent in the history of the world. For peace with Egypt, Israel returned the entire Sinai. There is little thanks on the part of Egypt for this generosity and this sacrifice for peace. The controlled Egyptian press spews daily anti-Israel venom. President Mubarak has never visited Jerusalem. It is the coolest possible peace. A sacrifice for peace brought in vain—probably a major act of folly on the part of Israel.

Israel made sacrifices for peace by signing a peace treaty with Jordan. In that peace, Israel granted Jordan a large yearly allowance of fresh water from its own dwindling and meager resources and accepted a petty demand for "border rectification"—yielding of land. As for Syria, no offered sacrifice for peace seems to be sufficient to satisfy its dictator, President Hafez Assad. He is unwilling to consider even an ice-cold peace, except for Israel's total surrender of the Golan Heights. Fortunately, under the current Israeli government such a surrender is not in the cards.

The greatest sacrifice for peace that Israel has brought was the resuscitation of the bankrupt and moribund PLO terror organization and the acceptance of it "chairman" Yasser Arafat as a negotiating partner. In this ill-advised process, foisted on Israel by world pressure and by its previous government, Israel has made far-reaching and existential sacrifices and concessions. It has yielded control of the Gaza Strip and of all major "West Bank" cities to the Palestinian Authority and has agreed to detailed plans to grant further autonomy to the Palestinians. In what is probably the ultimate folly in this process, Israel has tolerated the formation of a Palestinian "police force" (actually an army) of 40,000 men—the largest police-to-population ratio in the world (!)—and has equipped this "police force' with a complete arsenal of automatic weapons. As the world now knows, these weapons were turned on Israeli soldiers and civilians at the very first opportunity that the Palestinian leaders provoked.

Here are three good sacrifices that the Arabs could bring for peace: (1) Abandon the insistence on recovering the Golan; (2) Stop the clamor about the division of Jerusalem; (3) Disarm the Palestinian "police."

The Arab countries, not Israel, are killing peace in the Middle East. The PLO, apart from the bloody crimes that it has committed against Israel, has now established a virtual dictatorship in the territory allotted to it. In Egypt, thousands of Copts have been killed and their churches burned. President Assad of Syria has occupied Lebanon and has killed and tortured thousands. Iraq, under its dictator Saddam Hussein, is a rogue state attacking its neighbors and killing its own citizens. Saudi Arabia is a monarchical tyranny. Sudan is engaged in the systematic slaughter and enslavement of its black African people. How strange that nobody asks the Palestinians or any of the Arab states to bring any sacrifices for peace. Here are three good sacrifices that the Arabs could bring for peace: (1) Abandon the insistence on recovering the Golan; (2) Stop the clamor about the division of Jerusalem; (3) Disarm the Palestinian "police." Billy clubs are good enough for London Bobbies. Why should any more be needed to patrol Nablus, Hebron and Bethlehem?

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Musical Berlin blossomed in great part because Leo Kestenberg placed so much faith in education. And Busoni was not the only major creator-pedagogue to take up residence. In the crucial post of director of the *Musikhochschule*, the elite Music College, Kestenberg installed Franz Schreker, who ought to have been the great discovery of the current Weimar revival (if only the recordings were better sung). Schreker was the one true German impressionist, composing in splashes of luminous color and delicate half-tints. The decadently contemporary Viennese scenario of his breakthrough opera *Der ferne Klang*, in which a Schrekerian composer-hero gropes for a "distant sound," exercised much influence on *Zeitoper* composers of the '20s. Other operas by Schreker recapitulated the success of *Der ferne Klang*, raising dangerously high expectations. By 1924, however, the medieval melodrama *Irrelohe* caught him playing catch-up with young radicals. A similar fate befell Alexander Zemlinsky, who conducted and composed in Berlin in the late '20s. He, too, was a greatly gifted Austrian lyricist who somewhat lost his way in the maze of Berlin's stylistic development. His best scores were composed before the war.

One would never guess from Schreker's shimmery style that he was an exacting teacher who had a thorough grasp of the whole repertory. He taught Krenek, Wolpe, Alois Habá and Goldschmidt. "Our art has come a long way through the centuries," Schreker told his students wisely. "You are to traverse that path in just a few years. You're learning a language, a means of expression, a skill, a technique. Be patient! The freedom you seek must be fought for and earned." They didn't listen. Schreker himself fell out of fashion. Christopher Hailey points out that the composer's art was fundamentally one of emotionalism, subjectivism, color, a kind of international or pan-European beauty of sound. He describes how Schreker came to seem dated in the '20s: "Where he strove for automatic, unconscious, stylistic assurance, there was now self-conscious stylistic awareness; where he sought personality and originality, there was fashion and novelty." The international Modern turned out to be fiercely nationalistic and parochial. Schreker, the Austrian-Jewish troubadour of timbre, was left without a home.

Like Busoni, Schreker privately doubted the value of much of the new music, but he picked two quite notorious names to fill slots in the faculty: Arnold Schoenberg and Paul Hindemith. Schoenberg, the adamant prophet of atonality, took over Busoni's compositional master class at the Prussian Academy of Arts in 1926. His influence was not so profound as it had been in Vienna; his student Alban Berg had already eclipsed him with the tumultuous and hugely successful Berlin premiere of *Wozzeck* in 1925. Schoenberg had gone from being the outrage of Vienna to respectable, even curmudgeonly status in Berlin. The changing attitudes of Weill track that progress. In 1919, Schoenberg had sent a curt postcard to the young Weill, who giddily wrote to his brother, "The phrasing of the card is so modern that we're all in raptures over it here." By the end of the '20s, Weill was attacking composers who solved arcane problems "behind closed doors," Schoenberg plainly indicated as the chief conspirator. Still, Schoenberg found in Berlin the most congenial atmosphere of his career. Los Angeles, his final destination after the Nazi takeover, would not be so kind.

It was inevitable, too, that Paul Hindemith would end up in Berlin. He had been the *enfant terrible* of German music; his fox-trots, shimmies and ragtimes overpowered all rivals. Taking up where Stravinsky's acidulous music-hall anthology *Histoire du soldat* left off, his works struck a balance of toughness and elegance that aroused Berlin's envy, Weill's not least. This gifted but overfacile composer reached the apex of his career in the early 1920s, when he produced a stunning quantity of music in all genres; he thrived notably in genres in which Stravinsky's output was sparse or uneven, in opera, songs and chamber music. He arrived in Berlin in 1927, as professor of composition at the *Musikhochschule*. He found his legacy spread all around him. In a dispiriting passage to maturity, he recoiled into orderliness, plotting out meticulous hierarchies of tonal chords and intervals, ideals of apolitical artisanship and demands for educational functionality. He began writing music that, in Stravinsky's cruel phrase, had "all the juice and flavor of cardboard."

Busoni, Schreker, Schoenberg and Hindemith made a bizarre cast of patriarchs—and I haven't mentioned loony old Hans Pfitzner. Still, these men were the soul of musical Berlin in its heyday. The young composers who thronged to the city followed one or another of their paths, sometimes all of them at once. They copied the teachers' flaws: Busoni's inclination toward the cryptic fragment, Schreker's love of pulsating atmosphere, Schoenberg's polemicism, Hindemith's demand for trivial usefulness. What they all had in common was a certain brokenness or incompleteness of personality. Even Schoenberg left an irreconcilable gap between his late-Romantic and atonal styles. Strauss, who found a way to maintain his personal voice through the stylistic chaos that he helped to create, was dismissed as terribly unfashionable. Asked if he was a Wagnerian or a Brahmsian, Strauss once remarked that he was a Selfian. In Weimar, however, the Self went out of fashion.

III.

Berlin belonged to the young. What a frightening crowd they were! Ernst Krenek, who followed Schreker to Berlin from Vienna, issued ultra-dissonant string quartets and sprawling, iconoclastic symphonies; he was to produce Weimar's most substantial international hit in 1927, in *Jonny spielt auf*. Stefan Wolpe marked out the limits of political activism in music; he was a leader of concerts organized by the *Novembergruppe*, which mixed communist protest with smatterings of Dada. Ervín Schulhoff, the Czech composer and sometime Dadaist who moonlighted as a jazzman, also lived briefly in Berlin. He composed a *Symphonia Germanica*, in which a singer or untrained voice shrieks the words of *Deutschland über alles* while a piano bangs out crazy free-jazz-ish chords. Alois Habá experimented prolifically with microtonal music, dividing the scale into unheard-of intermediate degrees and designing new instruments to play them. (In this he carried on a pet project of Busoni.)

All these composers tended to produce their best work early. Wolpe would seem to be the exception, having established a prosperous twelve-tone career in the United States during and after the war; but his pre-war music always sounds a shade more vibrant and direct. Krenek's Second and Third Symphonies (recently given a decent recording on the CPO label) contain his strongest writing, with juxtapositions of solemn Mahlerian threnody and sarcastic dance-hall jollity that prefigure the mature style of Shostakovich. But his *Jonny* is listenable only as a pompous novelty item, and works thereafter exhibit such swift changes of style, from secondhand jazz to Schubertian Romanticism to Schoenbergian dodecaphony, that any sense of a Krenek personality dissipates. Schulhoff is an even greater mystery. In the '20s he wrote several expert, deeply felt chamber pieces, poised between Schoenberg and Bartók; subsequently, he meandered into blowsy Socialist-Realism,

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pursuing a more direct communication with the masses. He is now celebrated and recorded many times over as a victim of the Nazi regime. (He died of typhus in a concentration camp in 1942.) But his musical career had undergone a crisis long before his political martyrdom.

At first, Kurt Weill stood apart from this young crowd. During the time of his studies with Busoni, he was noted for his seriousness and sobriety. Very remarkable in hindsight is a statement that he made in a letter to his teacher: "I am afraid that Hindemith has already danced too far into the land of the fox-trot." His early works smack of high-German, high-modern ambition. He set Rilke, Richard Dehmel, medieval German poets, medieval Hebrew poets, the Lamentations of Jeremiah. He wrote a large orchestral piece inspired by *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke*. His First Symphony takes its program from a socialist-anarchist drama by the poet Johannes Becher, clangorously titled *Workers, Farmers, Soldiers, or, A People's Awakening to God*. Even when he began to engage with more up-to-date literary figures of the Weimar Republic—Iwan Goll, Georg Kaiser and eventually Bertolt Brecht—he retained a scholastic stiffness of voice.

Aside from Busoni himself, Weill's idol was Gustav Mahler, whose surging string lines were often quoted in the 1920s. Mahler embraced the sounds of the contemporary landscape in all their jarring polyphony, but he also subdued them in a severe, classically controlled frame. Weill set out on a similar mission, except that in place of Mahler's all-inclusive disorder he made his mark with a strict, spare, direct style, in which popular elements fused with classical material in sculptural forms. So he took his cue, again, from Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and *Histoire du soldat*, with their surrealist jumble of deracinated popular styles. What Weill could take from both Mahler and Stravinsky was the aesthetic of incision, the arrogant appropriation of the low from on high. As he grew older, however, Weill developed an increasing respect for his primary popular materials, and he became hypnotized by them. The composer who once saw Hindemith dancing too far into the land of the fox-trot denounced composers who went anywhere else.

Reading through Jürgen Schebera's concise, well-judged biography, one is struck by the composer's obsessive and fetishistic attachment to the "new," in endlessly self-duplicating rhetorical formulations. In 1927 he announces "a new kind of musico-dramatical work for the Ruhr." That same year, in connection with *The Threepenny Opera*, he sees "something fundamentally new.... A completely new form of stage work is evolving." It was a "primitive form of opera," a "prototype of opera." The *Berliner Requiem* and *Lindberghflug*, two years later, inaugurate "a new form between concert and theater." *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* is a new form of "epic opera." Jasager speaks to "new market outlets ... the workers' choral movement and the schools." And there's also folk opera, "a new type of work which I would like to call the 'layman's opera.'" Finally, in America, it is a "new combination of the three elements music-drama-radio," a new "American opera," a new "Broadway opera."

We can see what Weill wanted: an opera that accessibly bridged the classical and the popular. But his utopian conviction that the next work had to be *the* new one, *the* breakthrough, meant that he could never be satisfied with the present. This was the Berlin syndrome: every artistic step had to be sold as "new and improved," not as the continuation of a process begun in previous works. In this respect, of course, Berlin was not unique; Paris experienced the same frenzy with the machine-age stunts of Les Six and Stravinsky, and the whole international avant-garde would be overrun with intellectual novelty-seeking after the Second World War. Still, Weill came inspiringly close to the realization of his complex aims. He resolved, with apparent ease, fundamental contradictions between modernist rhetoric and populist rhetoric. That those contradictions eventually precipitated outward, that the populist overwhelmed the modernist, does not take away from the temporary strength of his achievement in a commercial culture, which was as impressive in its way as, say, Francis Coppola's brief reign as a commercially viable subversive genius in Hollywood in the 1970s.

KURT WEILL BY JACK COUGHLIN FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Consider, as a test case of the delights and problems of Weill's style, the "opera buffa" *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* (*The Tsar Has Himself Photographed*), first given in 1928. It was Weill's most popular piece next to *The Threepenny Opera* and it was performed at dozens upon dozens of German houses before Hitler's seizure of power in 1933. It dropped out of sight for decades thereafter, but like many of Weill's pieces it has recently come back to life, notably in a production at the Santa Fe Opera and in a recording on the Capriccio label. It is one of the strongest of Weill's German operas; it is also one of his very few true operas, rather than an odd hybrid of opera, theater and cabaret. It is stuffed full of social bric-a-brac of the period, but it has not dated in the least.

The plot, devised by the playwright Georg Kaiser, is a little masterpiece of

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Berliner wit. A telephone rings in the atelier of the fashionable Paris photographer Angèle; it is the Tsar, traveling incognito, wanting to have his portrait taken. Terrorists burst in moments later, sending away Angèle and her assistants. A "false Angèle," ready to fire a gun under the robed camera, takes her place. The Tsar enters and begins bantering with the beautiful fake photographer. As she is about to "take the picture," he suddenly insists on taking *hers*; a seductive back-and-forth ensues. She has her quarry in her sights several times, but the Tsar's youthful charm distracts her. A chief of police interrupts to announce an assassination plot has been discovered. She now wishes only to escape; she pretends to give in to the Tsar's advances, dances a tango with him and buries him under pillows on a couch. The true Angèle emerges from hiding. To save her reputation, she must hide all evidence of the plot, so she fires off the gun harmlessly, shoves the confused Tsar in front of the camera and takes his photograph as the curtain falls.

This scenario contains politics, but it does not hawk them. The terrorist is sympathetic in her high ideals, but so is the Tsar. Assassination is quite possibly nothing more than a metaphor for modern love: both the Tsar and the terrorist are suspicious, in different ways, that each wants to "shoot" the other, take a sexual snapshot, add to a collection. The sexual metaphor implicit in all the talk of "photography" was emphasized even more in two other titles Kaiser and Weill had bandied about for the project: *Photographie und Liebe* ("Photography and Love") and *Der Zar lässt sich.....* ("The Tsar Has His....."). Why Weill acclaimed the second title as "marvelously bold and striking" in a letter to Lotte Lenya, and why he then withdrew it just before publication in a concession to public decency, is explained in the exhaustive footnotes of the Weill-Lenya letters. *Der Zar lässt sich* closely resembles the renowned obscenity employed in Goethe's Götz von Berlichingen, *Er kann mich im Arsch lecken*, which more polite authors abbreviated to *Er kann mich....* In short, the opera was to have been titled *The Tsar Has His Ass Kissed.*

A male chorus chants the sniggering title as a comically austere utterance at the outset. The tonality is highly unstable but not given over to dissonance; its lurching modulations, notably from C minor to E-flat minor in the first few bars, is utterly typical of the harmonic movement of Weill's mature Weimar style. That disaffected chanting chorus, that militant lyric line, that itinerant harmony, all are typical of the Weill that we associate with Brecht; but Weill had first worked with Brecht only in the middle of the Tsar project, and he had established the fundamentals of his mature method from the outset of this piece. And the Brechtian alienation effect in the chorus's chant seems more like comedy than propaganda.

This is an opera in which Weill maintains a beautiful balance between light and dark, between dissonance and pop melody. His masterstroke at the end was the "Tango Angèle," which was to become his first "hit." It is designed to be played not by the orchestra in the pit, but by a gramophone onstage. The technological innovation was not only a typically advanced Weimar gesture, it was also a way of securing a distinction between the popular and the classical. In his opera, Weill remains aware of a real divide between genres, but he does not attempt the total dissolving of boundaries which would eventually lead him to the other side.

Der Zar is a delight. *The Threepenny Opera* is something more, a masterpiece as shockingly original in this century as Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* was in the last. But Weill did not build on it; he could not repeat its mediation of opposites, its limbo position between genres. He found himself under musical-political pressure to choose among various markets, publics, genres: to go with Mahler or Marlene. Most significantly, he found himself under attack from Schoenberg, who saw him as an apostate from the Modern project. If only Weill could have found a way to resist the burgeoning polemic between high and low, elite and mass culture. Theodor Adorno, in some penetrating writings on *The Threepenny Opera*, indicated that it managed to escape that polarity, existing as a subversive and complex version of mass art. But Weill took the easier tone, issuing demands for "communicative," populist, simple-minded music. And the false polarity of Weill and Schoenberg was the beginning of a polemic that has bruisingly divided music ever since.

IV.

There is another way to listen to the music of Berlin between the wars. One can accept its failures, its inconsistencies, its irresponsible novelties. ("Mushrooms after heavy rain," in

Self-Portrait as Four Styles of Pompeian Wall Painting

First Style

To become oneself is so exhausting
that I am as others have made me,
imitating monumental Greek statuary
despite my own feminized way of being.
Like the empire, I was born of pain—
or like a boy, one might say, for I have
become my father, whom I cannot fathom;
the past is a fetish I disdain.
Since they found the bloodless little girl,
with voluptuous lips, buried in me,
I am unsentimental. I do not see
the gold sky at sunset but blackbirds hurled
like lava stones. I am like a severed
finger lost in the wreckage forever.

Second Style

Unable to care for people, I care
mostly for things. At my bitterest,
I see love as self-censorship.
My face is a little Roman theater
in perfect perspective—with colonnades
and landscapes—making illusionistic
reference to feelings I cannot admit.
Painted in Dionysiac yellows and reds,
my unconscious is a rocky grotto
where flies buzz like formalists.
Despite myself, I am not a composite
of signs to be deciphered. In the ghetto—
where Jews, prostitutes and sailors once lived—
I am happiest because I am undisguised.

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Schreker's words.) This way of listening benefits greatly from the culture of recordings. On recordings, you receive the fragment, and the fragile blossom, more easily. You do not feel the collective pressure of a live hall, the pressure of a crowd desiring a satisfaction so intense that it is provided only by the most familiar music. The musical tradition has always thrived on the perpetuation of a few major personalities; the whole complicated code of musicianship and connoisseurship that maintains institutions such as the opera and the orchestra requires the towering presence of Bach or Beethoven; only a distant culture god can compel the endless repetition that generates expertise. Such a pantheon was denied to Berlin in the '20s. And yet the music can still haunt us, not least with its promise of greatness.

Recordings certainly rescue Schreker. Whether *Der ferne Klang* could really work in a modern opera house is doubtful. As a theater piece, it would probably fare about as well as one of the heavier Symbolist dramas, say, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Axel*, would play on modern Broadway. Even as a continuous experience on CD, it goes in and out of focus. In fragments, though, it comes near to genius. Its wonderful third-act garden scene interweaves rapturous tenor lyricism, woodwind birdsong, polytonal church bells and a long celesta solo that sounds like sunlight incarnate. In a particular sense, this is pure music—not deathless Bachian polyphony, not high-flown contrapuntal argument, but pure sensation, pure scattered loveliness of sound. With Marco Polo's survey of the Schreker operas, the listener can savor the music in self-selected moments, like an improviser trying chords at the piano. (Surely it was in this spirit that John Ashbery wrote "On First Listening to Schreker's Der Schatzgräber.")

Through recordings, too, Hindemith's reputation will hold to some fraction of its former size. The irony is that Hindemith wrote music to be useful, often finishing a manuscript on the morning of the performance; recordings, meanwhile, are aesthetic, apolitical, antisocial. But the medium's eclecticism is actually a great boon to this composer, who produced some extraordinarily fine scores and a great deal of facile rubbish. His music of the early '20s is still the most impressive: the seductively brutal piano suite *1922* (available as part of an authoritative recorded cycle by Hans Petermandl on the Marco Polo label); the eerily cool and spare setting of Georg Trakl in *Der junge Magd* (on MD+G), and the early one-acters on decadent themes (all well served by Wergo's Hindemith edition). But the composer's Berlin years also produced a few broader, more balanced masterpieces, in which Hindemith's incipient conservatism did not yet overwhelm his youthful vitality, notably the Cello Concerto and the opera *Cardillac*. The burnished, eloquent concerto suggests the major composer Hindemith might have become if he had lived in a quieter, more Brahmsian time.

Weill has profited most from the record-everything-in-sight ethos of the CD era. Recordings have disclosed music that was not previously accessible even in manuscript form. David Drew, Kim Kowalke and other Weill scholars have spent countless hours reassembling scores from a chaos of scattered manuscripts, performance parts and poorly catalogued publishers' materials. This chaos exists because the composer cared little about the preservation of his scores, committed as he was to the here and now. Listening to *Der Zar* on record, you strain for the total theatrical effect: the satirical Greek chorus chanting ominously in top hats, the exhilarating irony of an anarchist preparing to assassinate the czar through the lens of a society photographer's camera. And yet could any of Weill's operas now be perfectly staged? Wouldn't contemporary directors muck up the effect with facile contemporary parallels? And isn't it true that the element of calculation in Weill's music, the multiple layering of styles and genres, always come off a little cool in a live hall? The work is most authentic when it is perfectly embalmed in historical practice, as on the great old CBS recording of *The Threepenny Opera*, with every off-key rasp and groan following the strictures of Lotte Lenya.

Weill's contradictions—the demand for a populist theater, the tendency toward surrealist sophistication—would have been resolved if he made soundtracks for images, if he had pursued a career in film. Not in Hollywood, of course, where the composer was worth nothing, but in some dreamlike continuation of the German film industry as it had developed in the 1920s. There was one attempt, *The Threepenny Opera* as directed by Pabst, but it was a notoriously misjudged collaboration. An indication of what might have been comes in the new volume of Weill-Lenya letters:

Third Style

Tearing away at an old self to make
a new one, I am my most Augustan.
I grieve little. I try to accustom
myself to what is un-Hellenized and chaste.
I let my flat black dado assert itself
without ornament. Can it be, at last,
that I am I—accepting lice clasped
to me like a dirty Colosseum cat?
On a faded panel of Pompeian red,
there's an erotic x-ray of my soul:
a pale boy-girl figure is unconsoled,
pinned from behind at the farthest edge
of human love, where the conscience is not whole,
yet finely engraved like a snail's shell.

Fourth Style

If great rooms declare themselves by the life
lived in them, each night I am reborn
as men and boys stroll among the ruins,
anonymously skirting the floodlights,
sinking into me tenderly, as they do
each other during their brief hungry acts.
"As brief as love," they used to say, Plato
and his kind, exiling man from happiness,
but I am more than a cave whose campfire,
swelling and contracting, is all that is real.
Tomorrow, when I am drunk on sunlight,
I will still feel the furtive glances,
the unchaste kisses and the wet skin
imprinting me until I am born again.

Henri Cole

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I have a big movie offer. Gab Frank is really a big wheel in the movies. In just six months he has built up "Europa-Distribution," which already is the only rival of UFA. He suggested that I do four films with him in the next two to three years. I've made extensive demands to have a decisive voice, especially as far as the director, the property, the screenwriter, etc., are concerned. The first film is to be done right away, and indeed it's a subject I can accept in good conscience: *Kleiner Mann—was nun?* by Fallada. For director they're negotiating with Gründgens, Berger and Viertel. It will be a big-budget, first-class movie, through which my name will develop such drawing power that afterward I'll be able to make musical films entirely according to my own ideas. I'm quite inclined to accept the offer.

This is all rather fantastic and not terribly uplifting. As a naked statement of ambition in the doomed month of January 1933, however, it haunts the imagination.

The letters to Lenya do not strike as many sonorous chords as his many manifestos for "new opera," but they show a more practical mind. The German cinema, at least, would have allowed Weill to retain his *Threepenny* style. But Broadway forced a wholesale transformation of his vocabulary, an abandonment of the classical art that Busoni had bestowed on him.

Lurking just offstage is the inevitable argument over the value of Weill's Broadway period, during which the composer of *The People's Awakening to God* produced *The Lady in the Dark, One Touch of Venus* and *Lost in the Stars.* I am insufficiently sympathetic to the genre as a whole to assess Weill's contribution. The limited, less tendentious point to be made about Weill on Broadway is that what he wrote in the 1920s was no less popular than what he wrote in the 1940s. Indeed, the vast success of *The Threepenny Opera* in Germany marked the pinnacle of his commercial career, though the same piece perversely failed when it reached New York in 1933.

The great irony is that Weill did achieve mass popularity with classical means. The whole classical culture of Weimar was geared toward *Schlager*, hits, breakthroughs. If the commercial calculations were faulty, if Leo Kestenberg's general ideal of a working-people's modernism misunderstood both the desires of the public and the realities of the political situation (as John Rockwell showed in his unpublished doctoral thesis on the politics of Weimar opera), somehow all these one-hit wonders of the Weimar Republic still prosper stealthily on recordings.

Kurt Weill was the greatest composer that interwar Berlin produced, but he was not great. He did not have the thunder of the grand seigneur, such as you hear in the imperious announcement Busoni delivered during one of his failed American sojourns: "Telegram from my agent: 'Congratulations on success in Los Angeles, signifies much for the future.' My God! ... Am I a person who seeks a future in California? But perhaps he means California's future—I wish it all prosperity." What serene arrogance. Was Busoni, with Strauss, merely an artifact of nineteenth-century grandiosity? No, it was just that German grandiosity was reeling to a close. While Weill was writing *Fun to be Free* for Madison Square Garden, Olivier Messiaen was in a German prisoner-of-war camp, writing *Quartet for the End of Time.* •

The Never-ending Herstory

BY DAVID A. BELL

The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1500-1800 by Olwen Hufton

(Knopf, 638 pp., $35)

Consider a few scenes from the history of women in Europe:

• In the late seventeenth century, at Versailles, the young Duc of Saint-Simon asked an influential courtier for his 14-year-old daughter's hand in marriage. The courtier replied that the girl in question had already committed herself to the church. Not to worry, Saint-Simon countered brightly. Any of her six younger sisters would do. What he really wanted, he explained, was to marry the family.

• In 1721, in the Breton capital of Rennes, following a disastrous fire, the city fathers undertook to rebuild the city's drainage system. In one of the old drains, workers uncovered the skeletons of eighty newborn infants, apparent victims of infanticide at the hands of their mothers.

• In 1576, in England, the legal age of consent for females was lowered from 12 to 10.

• In early modern Ireland, it was an established practice for penniless sons of the minor gentry to abduct and to rape young heiresses. Having been deflowered, the women found their reputations hopelessly compromised and, in many cases, had no choice but to marry their rapists.

• In the early modern Netherlands and Britain, more than 200 women were discovered to have passed themselves off for years as men. Some of them fought in the British and Dutch navies, where they became legendary for their bravery. Several more contracted marriage with other women. In a few rare cases, while disguised as men, they even committed bigamy.

These are just a few of the facts and stories, often horrifying, sometimes darkly comic, occasionally inspiring, that Olwen Hufton recounts in her sparkling history of the prospects awaiting women in Western Europe between 1500 and 1800. It is a book that revels in the gritty details of forgotten lives. Ranging with enormous skill and knowledge from the glitter and pomp of Versailles to the shining stoops of Amsterdam's middle-class houses (and just who was washing them?) to the fetid urban slums and dark, wretched, dirt-floored farmhouses, often shared with farm animals, where most early modern Europeans were born and died, Hufton aims at nothing less than a total history of these women's experiences. To a remarkable degree, she succeeds. And yet in some important ways she fails, and in so doing Hufton reveals some of the limits of the sort of history that she writes.

Hufton's sort of history is not merely "women's history," it is also what is sometimes called "history from below." The latter method represents a turning away from the doings of the rich and powerful in order to bring the forgotten masses of the common people back into the light of historical analysis. In 1974, Hufton produced what is still one of the masterpieces of this historiography, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France,* which presented a sweeping and evocative picture of how most French men and women actually lived in the age of Diderot and Madame de Pompadour.

Always uncomfortably close to the knife-edge of subsistence, Hufton's humble subjects managed to make ends meet through what she called an "economy of

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makeshifts," supplementing the insufficient yields of their miserable plots of land by spinning wool, repairing tools, growing grapes wherever a vine could catch a ray of sun and a hundred other such expedients. Every year, millions of them would take to the road as migrant laborers, tramping hundreds of miles in search of the odd penny (and just as importantly, leaving one less mouth to feed at home). And if an irrepressible tide of bad luck slopped over these meager defenses, they would slide from poverty into indigence and destitution, desperately resorting to theft, beggary and prostitution to keep from starving (one in thirteen women in Paris in the eighteenth century earned money from prostitution), sometimes even committing infanticide, and finally succumbing by the tens of thousands in times of famine or plague.

Hufton also laid out lucidly the ways in which the poor struggled to avoid such a fate. The heroines of her history were the peasant girls who would set out, between puberty and their mid-20s, to accumulate a dowry sufficient to make a good match and to establish a household prosperous enough to survive bad times. Putting in endless hours of harsh, dreary labor as domestic servants, or risking early death from tuberculosis working in the damp textile factories of Lyons or Lille, balancing the terrible loneliness of their situations against the dangers of seduction and pregnancy, facing all manner of obstacles, they patiently accumulated their pitifully small stakes, one battered copper coin at a time. Some of them met their goal; more did not.

By turning from France to Western Europe as a whole, from the eighteenth century to the entire period that historians call "early modern" and from the poor of both sexes to women of all classes, Hufton has now accumulated many other heroines. They are fully on display in her new book. There is the eighteenth-century Dutch midwife Catharina Schrader, who claimed in her memoirs to have assisted in 4,000 deliveries over more than fifty years. "The widow of a surgeon, who may have endowed her with some anatomical knowledge above the run of midwives," Hufton writes, "she was inherently suspicious of medical men when it came to the delicate business of bringing babies into the world."

And there is the seventeenth-century Venetian nun Arcangela Tarabotti, who penned eloquent works in praise of women and who denounced, far more cogently than Diderot (who wrote a novel on the subject), the practice of putting girls in convents against their will. "Her vocabulary is that of the Enlightenment which has yet to take place. The convent is hell when free will is excluded." There are also the more familiar figures of the early feminists Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges, who in 1791 wrote a "Declaration of the Rights of Woman" to protest her exclusion from the Rights of Man. But still standing front and center is the humble peasant girl, whose difficult progress from child to servant, to wife, to mother and finally, perhaps, to widow, forms the heart of the book's first 250 pages.

There are villains aplenty, too. "Edward Coke, the father of English liberties in his struggle against the absolutist tendencies of the Stuarts, tied his daughter to the bedpost and whipped her until she agreed to the match he had arranged for her," Hufton writes acidly, adding a little superfluously that "the marriage was a disaster." There are the textile owners who mercilessly exposed their mostly female labor forces to deadly working conditions, and the clerics and the philosophers who considered women nothing more than reproductive vessels, possessed of inferior powers of reasoning as well as uncontrollable lust. There are the legislators who wrote women's supposed inferiority into law, and the writers who enshrined it in poetry and prose. There are the Irish abductors. Above all, there are the priests and ministers and judges who, between 1560 and 1660, condemned tens of thousands of women to death for witchcraft. While men as well as women were accused of that crime, the learned prosecutors singled out a particular social type for particular attention: elderly, isolated, poor and often infirm women who survived only on the grudging charity of their neighbors. In their trials for witchcraft, Hufton writes, "the most tragic aspects of the female predicament were converted into a potential capital offense."

Hufton's genius as a historian is for selecting striking, visceral details that bring something of the smell and the feel of the early modern period out of the ground. Indeed, she has a particular fascination with dirt and the things that live there. She reports that one luckless farmer was found after his death to have harbored no fewer than thirty-nine separate species of worms in his digestive tract. She also relates that mothers considered the scaly infant skin ailment called cradle cap a natural protection for the developing skull, and allowed it to form a hard crust that remained on the child's head for

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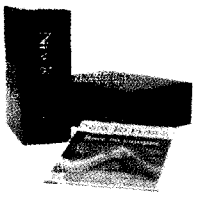

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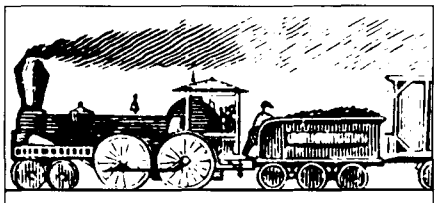

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years. "There was something of a cult of bodily filth," she explains. "It was believed that the body produced fluids that were needful to good health and which should not be washed away but merely sponged to remove odor. James I [of Great Britain] never washed more than his fingers...." History from below, indeed.

It is when Hufton soars high above the level of the soil, and attempts to survey the broad landscape of her subject, that her touch becomes a little less sure, her tone markedly more hesitant. A degree of hesitation is understandable, to be sure. How can one possibly generalize about women from Sicily to Scotland and Brittany to Bavaria, over a period that ranges from Luther to the French Revolution, and across every social class? Hufton's conclusion is remarkable mostly for its lack of large claims. It is that women's lives, like men's lives, changed relatively little during these 300 years. For most women, the simple struggle for existence remained paramount, and meaningful choices about spouse, career, children, residence and so on remained severely limited.

The single most important changes between 1500 and 1800, in Hufton's account, derived from modifications in the structure of European religious life: witchcraft trials ended, in many countries convents were dissolved, charismatic sects that offered women spiritual outlets declined in importance, and religious observance became more tightly associated with "private" life—thus giving rise to the stereotype of women as particularly pious. Beyond this, a few women gained more liberty in regard to marriage, took part in a consumer revolution that allocated a special place to them as arbiters of fashion, and increasingly found work outside the home. Still, for the millions of peasant women engaged in back-breaking labor scratching subsistence out of the ground, these developments amounted to little more than distant whispers.

In this emphasis on the material constraints of life, and on the slow pace of change across the centuries, Hufton presents a very different view of the period than the view given by most of the leading women's historians working today. These historians tend to dwell less on obscure peasants and more on female writers and political figures, less on specific individuals and more on the way women and men generally were represented, mostly in the realms of literature, the arts, the law and politics. If Hufton deals with the history of women, they deal with the history of gender, by which is meant both the relationship between the sexes and the way this relationship figures in different areas of human endeavor. They tend to write cultural history rather than economic and social history, and to see the centuries that Hufton covers as notable for complex patterns of cultural change, as traditional forms of patriarchy broken down—often to be succeeded, they claim, by new and more rigorous forms of separation and discrimination.

The differences among the historians are in large part generational. Hufton, with her "history from below," belongs to a cohort of scholars trained in the heyday of the *Annales* school, when leading historians (particularly of France) concentrated on the slow patterns of climactic, demographic and economic change over the *longue durée*. It is wholly characteristic of this approach that Hufton turns only with a certain reluctance to women's participation in the realm of culture and "mentalities" after thoroughly immersing herself in the grit and grime of economic and social history. Inevitably, cultural themes get slighted. Writing by women receives a subtle, if overly compressed, thirty-nine pages, but the fascinating subject of actresses gets just two pages, and women painters (admittedly a rare species, but including such well-known figures as Vigée-Lebrun) are dismissed in a single paragraph.

Hufton also belongs to the first, pioneering, optimistic generation of feminist historians, linked to the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, who saw their task as recovering the stories of those women left out of history as it had been written by men, and who believed that their work, through its capacity to inspire, could palpably further the cause of women's equality. The subsequent generation of women's historians are far more complex in their analyses, and also far less certain about the potential of political action, given how deeply and intricately they perceive gender roles to be entwined with the social and cultural foundations of the modern world. Contrast Hufton's stories of inspiring heroines with Joan Wallach Scott's recent book *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*. The very first page of Scott's book brings up "the downside of feminist experience: its intractable contradictions, the obsessive repetitions that seem to doom one generation to relive the dilemmas of its predecessors, and its inability to secure equal representation for women even when a long-sought goal such as the vote has been won." Through the prism of Scott's analysis, the writings of an early feminist such as Olympe de Gouges seem inspiring, but also deeply problematic.

Hufton has certainly read and absorbed the more recent "gender history" (her bibliography runs to forty-nine closely printed pages); but she remains distinctly suspicious of it. Again and again she warns against "overspeculation," against concentrating on the "theoretical or 'generic' woman and man" at the expense of "real women" and "the vast majority of people." Again and again she cites recent feminist studies, only to ask: "How do such representations relate to the lives of real men and women?" Against postmodern feminists who sometimes treat the very category of "woman" as a "social construction," she starkly invokes biological difference: "In the early modern period, biology has to count for something. No one, for example, could plough a five-inch furrow in a condition of advanced or even early pregnancy."

To some extent, it is hard not to sympathize with Hufton's point of view. These days, works of gender history, like most sorts of cultural history, often require the reader to press through a forbidding thicket of theory, only to reach a discussion which bases vast claims on the close reading of two or three texts. The language is frequently thick with jargon. Attention is lavished on textual and visual "representations," to which vast power and influence are attributed without much consideration of how widely they circulated, or how women and men of the time received them. After a large dose of this, Hufton's insistence on the lives of "real women," and her ability to conjure up the sights and smells of the past, comes as something of a relief.

Still, a more lucid style and a more vivid subject do not by themselves make one work of history superior to another. How illuminating is Hufton's approach, particularly in regard to the present-day situation of women, compared to that of the leading gender historians? A definitive answer to this question will have to await the publication of Hufton's second volume, which will cover the massive transformations in women's lives that have occurred since 1800. But consider one founding feature of political modernity that Hufton dwells on at length, on which she has carried out pioneering research: the French Revolution.

The women's historians of the 1960s and 1970s concentrated on putting women back into the story of the Revolution: the handful of women such as

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de Gouges and Madame Roland, who established reputations for themselves at the time; the larger but still small number who joined revolutionary clubs and associations; and the considerably larger number who figured in the great revolutionary crowds that stormed the Bastille. Hufton herself did seminal work on that classic revolutionary figure, the female bread rioter. Subsequently, though, attention has shifted to broader and more abstract questions of gender. Why did the Revolutionary government never consider giving women the vote? (The question did arise, not only in the writings of early feminists but also in those of a major thinker such as Condorcet.) Why did the (male) revolutionaries first tolerate the creation of women's political societies and then, in 1793, abruptly close them down? Did these actions signify the sequestration of women in a purely domestic "private sphere"? More recently still, leading women's historians have made ambitious attempts to view the Revolution as a whole through the prism of gender. Lynn Hunt has offered a psychoanalytic interpretation of the event that makes the revolutionaries' hysterical treatment of the mother-figure of Marie-Antoinette (whose trial in 1793 focused as much on her supposed abuse of her son as on her alleged treason) just as important as their execution of the "father of his country," King Louis XVI. Joan Scott has asked what the exclusion of women from the suffrage says not only about the situation of women themselves, but about the contradictions of the liberal democracy that the Revolution helped to "engender."

These are the sorts of arguments that Hufton, without dismissing them entirely, tends to find unduly speculative and insufficiently supported by the evidence. It is true that literary and political texts studied by many gender historians tell us relatively little about the actual lives of the vast majority of women, and drawing large generalizations from them is indeed speculative. Yet these texts can sometimes furnish insights into the dynamics of political and cultural change that Hufton's subject matter cannot.

Consider a short book published in France in 1798, by a judge named G. Boucher-Laricharderie, on the subject of how the Revolution had wrought changes in the French national character. Rather than discussing the effects of liberty and equality, or the Terror, Boucher preferred to dilate on the changing roles of men and women. Before 1789, he wrote, queens and mistresses had dominated the royal court, and the rest of French society had slavishly followed their example: "In all conditions and all ranks, women were granted the same predominance they had usurped over kings and ministers. Thus the humiliating expression, *nothing gets done without women*, was in every mouth, and governed all behavior."

This state of affairs made France the laughingstock of Europe, but Boucher could take consolation from the fact that it no longer prevailed. "This strange domination," he wrote sententiously, "expired on July 14, 1789." Eight years later, he continued, the French had come to understand that women "deviate from their natural purpose when, as Rousseau energetically put it, *they make men of themselves.* Women should limit their learning and the use of their talents to whatever makes them good mothers and excellent wives. They should have no other dominion than that of grace and sweetness, for the very delicacy of their organs, which makes them so successful in the realm of charm, makes them incapable of grasping those grand insights that constitute the science of government."

Hufton spends relatively little time on texts of this sort, whose influence is uncertain and whose relationship to the lives of "real women" is dubious. To be sure, Boucher enormously exaggerated the power of women in France before the Revolution, as well as the extent of their retreat into a "dominion of grace and sweetness" thereafter. Hufton suggests that opinions like his represent little more than variations on the timeless theme of male misogyny. And yet Boucher's text is a remarkable one. It not only posited natural differences between men and women that rendered the latter biologically unfit for political life, it also put these differences at the heart of Boucher's conception of politics as a whole: a state could only function properly if women stayed in their own, proper, private sphere.

Moreover, Boucher expressed in particularly blunt and telling language a point of view shared by many others of the period, including Rousseau. Not everyone agreed with them. Condorcet famously asked "why individuals exposed to pregnancies and other passing indispositions should be unable to exercise rights which no one has dreamed of withholding from persons who have the gout all winter"? But why did Condorcet's egalitarian ideas (not to mention those of Olympe de Gouges) fall on such barren soil? Why did the drafters of the Napoleonic Code subsequently do so much to restrict women's legal rights? Indeed, why did women not receive the right to vote in France until 1944, and why do they still have such a feeble presence in French politics, poor Edith Cresson notwithstanding?

Attributing all this to misogyny is not sufficient. Such an explanation begs the questions of why certain people embraced misogyny and others resisted it, and why, at a moment when the French were throwing so many other ancient prejudices onto the bonfire, they maintained and even reinforced this one. That is why it is important to trace more exactly the nature and the operation of sexual ideologies through close readings of works such as Boucher's. These sources reveal how powerful men understood the world around them at the turn of the nineteenth century. The world may have resisted these men's attempts to muster it into a new order, but the attempts still remain crucial to our understanding of historical change.

Hufton would probably not deny this point. But for her it is precisely the world's resistances, the messy, complex and half-regimented reality of history, that most profoundly matters. This is what she lavishes her attention on, what she describes with such intelligence and panache. *The Prospect Before Her* is a tour de force. It stands as a monument to history from below, and to the first generation of women's history. But if we are to ask how our own world, and the present-day relations between the sexes in all their complexities and their contradictions, emerged out of the patriarchal peasant culture that Hufton describes, we have to look not only at the resistances, at the enormous inertia of traditional societies, but also at the attempts made to force them into new channels. And here Hufton's successors may prove better guides.

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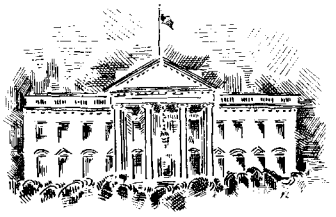
THE DECEMBER ISSUE OF *Washingtonian* magazine features a waggish cover story titled "WHY WASHINGTON WOMEN CAN'T COOK." The article, written by the unluckily named Dick Victory, has sparked a torrent of feminist censure. Diane Rehm, WAMU's imperturbable radio talk-show host, has declared herself "put off" by the piece: it "really offended me." *The Washington Post* has also denounced the article as "untrue, unfair and moronic." And a bevy of eminent epicures, including Jeane Kirkpatrick and the celebrity chef Nora Pouillon, have fired off an open letter to *Washingtonian*'s editors, voicing their dismay at "the old canard [the lie, not the duck] that professionally successful women cannot possibly cook (or be fit mothers or good wives)." The magazine's editors, cowed by this outburst of gastrofeminism, have wildly backpedaled. The piece, they now say, was intended merely as a humorous holiday romp, a "lighthearted look at the way Washingtonians live." Meanwhile, the abashed Dick Victory has abandoned his phallocentric swagger in favor of safer exposés. According to Fox News, his wish list of future projects includes a hard-hitting look at "Why Washington Men Can't Make Love."

VICTORY WAS TOO QUICK TO CONcede defeat. Any dinner guest who has choked down the uninspired, misbegotten cuisine that flows regularly from the Beltway's pewter-laden sideboards—the bland chicken; the tired fish; the dainty, drab, denatured desserts—will readily confirm his combustible thesis. If anything, Victory didn't go far enough. To hear him tell it, the typical Washington kitchen is a scandal, an oleophilic repository of processed cheese, baked eggs and Cool Whip. But lurking underneath his tone of amused dismay is a hint of the proprietary smugness shared by his fellow Washingtonians, many of whom view the city's culinary woes as a barometer of our personal and political rectitude. In her principled refusal to become a harried, stovebound kitchen wench, the Washington woman reveals her feminist mettle. "She has come to believe that 'cook' is a negative part of the job description of wife," muses Victory. "The sexual revolution [has] soured her permanently on kitchens." Once, women proved their revolutionary virtue by burning their bras. In Washington, they burn the toast.

NEVER MIND THAT THE ABILITY TO broil a chicken breast, or to conjure with nonchalant skill a soft, melting omelette, hardly condemns a girl to a life of domestic martyrdom. In shunning the arteriosclerotic delights of bountiful repasts, the Washington woman shows her commitment to healthy living. The Washington woman, Victory argues, believes that "to prepare something that tastes good would invite temptation, and temptation might lead to a thicker waist, a softer thigh, a shorter life." The Beltway's culture of culinary incompetence is perfectly summed up in an accompanying photo. In this creepy *tableau vivant*, a blond, power-suited yuppette looms over the dining-room table, brandishing with shy professional pride a charred, blackened hunk of mystery meat. Seated at the table are her long-suffering husband and son, who gaze at her handiwork in a kind of riveted horror.



AS RECENTLY AS A YEAR AGO, I WAS that woman. Lured to the stove by the piping of my boyfriend's empty stomach, I cooked doggedly, desperately. I produced murky cookies, crumpling pies and an apple brown betty that was pure poison. I was sweet-toothed, but butterfingered. I daubed spaghetti with peanut butter and called it sesame noodles. I produced "my version" of Potatoes Anna, a flotilla of undercooked potato fragments adrift in a milky sea. For company, there was a kind of phosphorescent pumpkin ravioli, purchased at a local gourmet grocery store and defrosted in the microwave with Taillevent-like seriousness and pretension. Did I feel any shame at this mutant fare? Hardly. To the contrary, I presented it with the misjudged flourish of *Washingtonian*'s pinstriped chatelaine. One night, things came to a head. My boyfriend could only manage a single bite of dinner before nausea trumped gallantry. I watched as he rummaged frantically through my kitchen cabinets, his mouth hanging open like that of a starved baby bird. Guilt overcame me, and I turned to my mother, who cheerfully passed along her gingham-bound 1976 edition of *Better Homes and Gardens*. Goodbye Potatoes Anna; hello Golden Bubble Ring, Dried Beef Log, Frosted Luncheon Meat, Chicken Whirlibirds, Spinning (spinning?) Ham. The recipes had a single goal: speed. Hence, "Ham with Cherry Sauce"—a five-pound tin of canned luncheon meat, slathered with forkfuls of canned cherry pie filling and thrust optimistically into the oven. Hence, "Hurry Seafood Curry." Don't even ask.

EMERGING FINALLY FROM A MUCK of mushroom soup, ground beef and chicken chunks, I vowed to seek a better path. I turned to the classics—Escoffier on the terrine; Brillat-Savarin on gallatines; M.F.K. Fisher on "How to Be Sage Without Hemlock." In Fisher, I finally found my muse. As the gastronomic savior of bedeviled housewives during World War II, Fisher urged her housebound readers to view cooking not as a Sisyphean grind, but as an exalted aesthetic duty. "[T]int your potatoes blue or rose or green!" she cried. "How do you know that you will not like them?" How indeed?

I DON'T KNOW PRECISELY when I became a Fisher epigone. All I know is that I woke up one morning discovering that I loved to cook—rich, hot, lavish meals. My boyfriend found he could ask for *petits pois* and *coulibiac* of bass—and get them. There were chutneys, pestos, salsas. There was stock reduced to within an inch of its viscous little life. There were croissants so light they floated up to the ceiling when they came out of the oven. There was orecchiette, conchiglie, fiochetti. There were lemon pudding soufflés so warm and soothing you wanted to bathe in them. There was a lamb stew so comforting you yearned to cradle it in your arms.

I BECAME FANATICAL ABOUT FOOD, possessed by food. I pursued the art of cooking with all the humorless abandon the Washington woman generally reserves for the art of networking. Washington, I declared, would no longer be a sensory wasteland—a C-SPAN and galoshes town, in the immortal lament of Republican operative Torie Clarke. Under my tutelage, it would be C-SPAN and ganaches, or perhaps C-SPAN and génoises. At dinner parties, I insisted that all guests wear garlands of parsley on their heads. I filled my kitchen with the appurtenances of culinary genius—flan rings, ramekins, giant paella pans—and yet, I found myself wanting more, more, more. How was I to sew shut a stuffed leg of veal, I raged, without the proper trussing needle and twine? And where was my blowtorch, for caramelizing mango crème brûlée? *Washingtonian* got it a little off. Washington women can cook. But the horror of it is, they cook like Washington women.

RUTH SHALIT

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Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

Ebonics

Most African-American parents in Oakland, California, were probably taken aback by a recent announcement. In December, the school board proclaimed that the native language of African-American children—and by extension that of their parents—was not English but Ebonics. In fact, there is a dispute among linguists, those who make a scientific study of languages, as to whether African-American speech patterns constitute a language, a dialect or a kind of American slang. This is not an issue nonlinguists are qualified to decide, but the Oakland board rushed boldly in to dub Ebonics a language.

This decision gave rise to many questions and much criticism. Did the board intend that Ebonics be taught along with English—the way Hispanic students, for example, often continue studying Spanish as they learn English? Did they intend it to be an alternative to mainstream English? Would teachers who were not proficient in Ebonics have to go to school to learn it—or risk losing their jobs?

The controversy also gives us something to be hopeful about.

Board members made it clear that they did not intend to set up a program in which kids would study Ebonics. On the contrary, they recognized that people who want to be successful in American society must be proficient in mainstream English. Many of Oakland's African-American students are not, and they are at a disadvantage when they try to get jobs or further education. The board deserves high marks for recognizing a serious problem. However, declaring Ebonics a language will not help them solve it.

As the Oakland board is using it, Ebonics is basically a self-esteem strategy, a pat on the head for African-American students. If black English is a *real* language, and not just a dialect or slang, then students are not wrong when they use it in class, just different. This is supposed to help kids feel better about themselves, but it will make raising their proficiency in mainstream English harder, not easier.

According to a *New York Times* article (December 30, 1996), the school board's resolution calls Ebonics "genetically based" and it makes "maintaining the legitimacy and richness of Ebonics" a "purpose" of the program. These phrases reveal the contradictions inherent in the Oakland policy. How can teachers juggle "maintaining the legitimacy of Ebonics" with teaching children not to use it? How will they tread the fine line between respecting a real language that is in their students' genes and correcting them because this language is a ticket to failure in the wider world? Teachers who are put in this bind will be under great pressure to be soft. And the more you soften things, the more standards dissolve. When nothing is really wrong, pretty soon there is nothing to teach because what the kid comes to school with in the first place is fine.

And the more you soften things, the more you open the door to kids' asking why they should bother with English: "I hear that what I speak is Ebonics and it's a real language. So why are you pestering me to talk white?" Instead of deciding that it is important to become proficient in mainstream English, some African-American students will decide that it is unnecessary or even disloyal—just the way some African-American youngsters have decided that working hard in school is "acting white."

The Oakland school board has a worthwhile goal. Its members should be tough enough to pursue it without introducing an issue that will only make it harder for them to succeed.

However, the Ebonics controversy also gives us something to be optimistic about. We have not moved nearly as far as we hoped we would in the 1960s when Martin Luther King talked about achieving a color-blind society. There is discord and anger between black and white Americans. African-Americans are suspicious—often with good reason—of white Americans and particularly those in power. Nevertheless, the people who were loudest in their criticism of the Oakland scheme, and most categorical in their demands that African-American children learn standard English, were African-Americans. Jesse Jackson and Maya Angelou spoke passionately about making sure that black children master the common tongue. The NAACP concurred. On a TV show that I watched, black parents and teachers joined in saying that the Oakland policy is a mistake and even an insult to black children. This is a hopeful sign. Ten, fifteen years ago, few would have dared to challenge people who said that African-American English is a separate tongue. Now, these people have to defend themselves against black parents.

There is another interesting and hopeful feature of this controversy. Right now, we are seeing a well-publicized movement—in charter schools and elsewhere—to reject the idea of common educational standards. Here, we have black teachers and parents rejecting what they perceive as a special standard and insisting that their children learn what all youngsters need to be part of the larger society. This is a triumph of common sense over ideology. We should all be glad—and consider it a good omen for 1997.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address Mr. Shanker at AFT, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1997 by Albert Shanker. Visit the AFT web site (http://www.aft.org).

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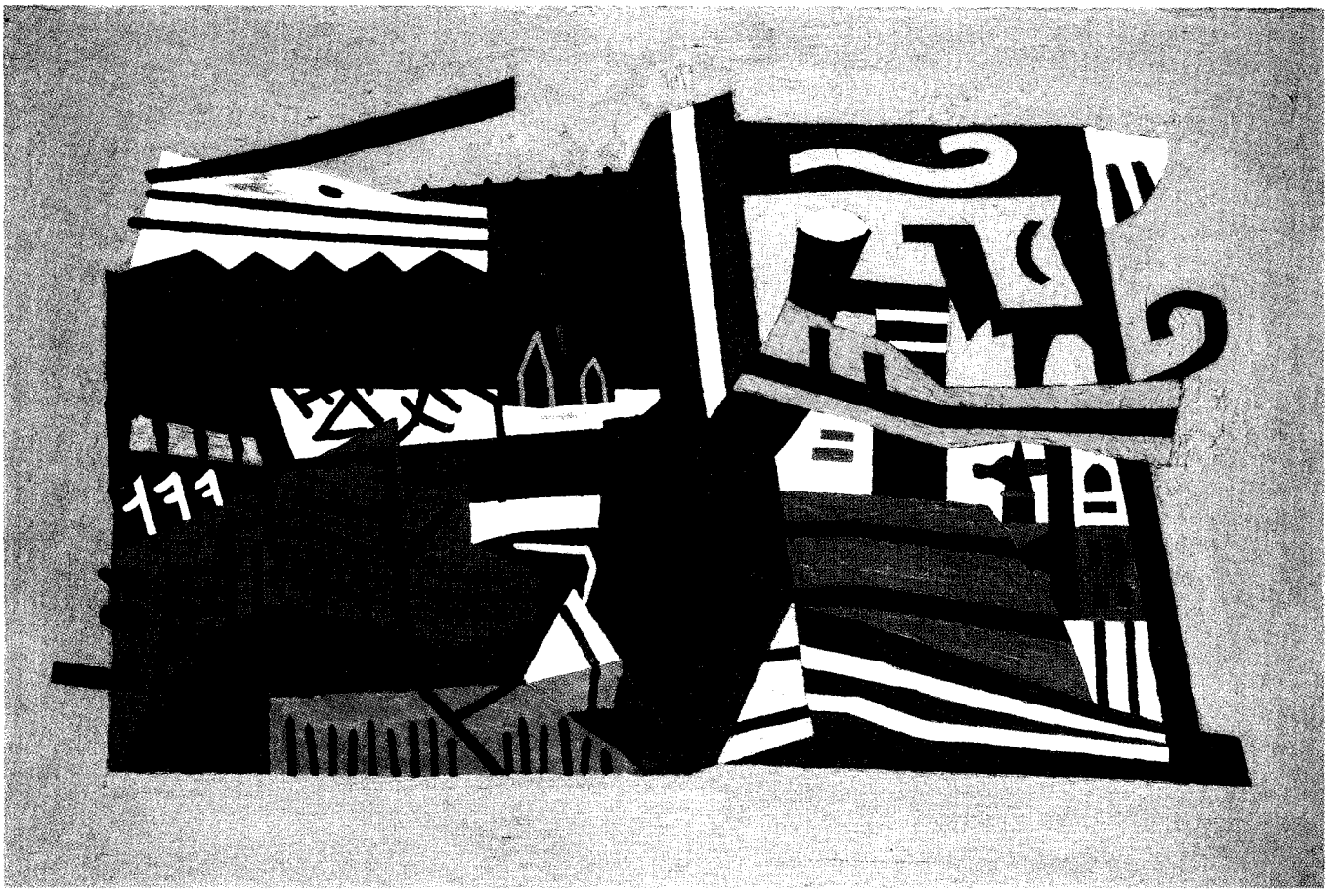

Cape Ann Landscape, 1938. Oil on canvas, 20 × 30 inches

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